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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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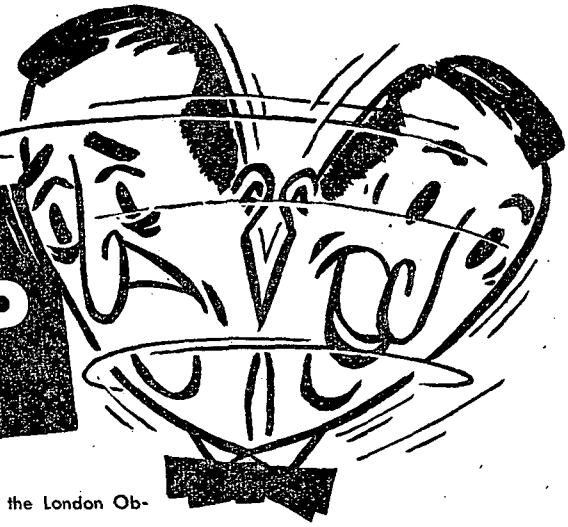
The Un-Strange Case of the TWO HEADED MAN



IVOR BROWN, associate editor of the London Observer, has said it better than we can:

"There are always two kinds of art. One faces, grips and wrestles with life. The other runs away from or at least discreetly evades it. There is no disgrace in such a flight into worlds of fancy free . . . In times of turmoil and anxiety the reader has more than ever the right to his ration of escape. If the Ellery Queens and Raymond Chandlers continue to weave intricate mysteries with the entrails of murdered millionaires or of gunmen cunningly outgunned, they serve a need. The novelist can do as much as the druggist in providing a refuge for sore minds and in contriving the means of sleep."

New York Times Book Review, February 18, 1951

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LAURITZ MELCHIOR, *noted heroic tenor:* "ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is a really fine collection of stimulating tales. After a strenuous opera or concert performance, I find real relaxation in reading a story or two in your magazine. I am all for it."

JOHN DICKSON CARR, famous mystery writer: "What I look for is not a clumsy concoction of boy-meets-girl-with-detective-incidents, but a detective story with an original idea. That's what I find in EQMM—the best detective magazine in the business."

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JAMES HILTON, *renowned auther of "Lost Horizon," "Good-by, Mr. Chips":* "I have seen and enjoyed many copies of EQMM. It seems to me just about the best form of escapism."

ETHEL MERMAN, *star of "Call Me Madam":* "EQMM is at once stimulating and relaxing, which explains why I enjoy reading it so much."

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All his life, André Maurois, the French novelist and biographer, wanted to write. When, as a young man, he appealed for advice to his best friend, Professor Alain, the professor of philosophy said: "If you wish to write, nothing will be more useful to you than to have lived first, to have employed yourself in a trade and to have known responsibility." Such practical advice from a professor of philosophy! So young Maurois went to work in his father's factory. But a person who wants to write, and who wants to deeply enough, will write; and so it turned out for André Maurois — his very first book, LES SILENCES DU COLONEL BRAMBLE, *transformed him, overnight, from an industrial executive into a popular and successful author.*

André Maurois has been called "a sophisticate who writes for people who love the urbane and the witty." His work has also been described as having delicacy of style and charming irony. You will find all these qualities in the curious little tale which follows . . .

We are extremely grateful to Ernest Rubin of Arlington, Virginia, for calling this "crime cocktail" to our attention and for graciously supplying the original text.

SUICIDE HOTEL

by ANDRÉ MAUROIS

"WHAT'S STEEL?" ASKED JEAN Monnier.

"Fifty-nine and one-fourth," answered one of a dozen clerks.

The clicking of their machines formed a jazz-like rhythm. Outside the window loomed the giant skyscrapers of Manhattan, their forty or fifty stories pierced by precise rows of windows. Telephones screamed and ribbons of paper unrolled with incredible rapidity, filling the office with their sinister serpentines, covered with cryptic letters and figures.

"What's Steel?" said Jean Monnier.

"Fifty-nine," answered Gertrude Miller.

She stopped a moment to look at the young Frenchman. Hunched in an armchair, his head in his hands, he seemed crushed.

"Another one who has gambled," she thought. "Tough luck for him. And tough luck for Fanny."

For two years before Jean Monnier, attached to the New York office of the Banque Holmann, had married his pretty and clever American secretary.

Copyright, 1938, by André Maurois

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A voice halloed outside the door. Harry Cooper entered. Jean Monnier rose.

"What a session!" said Harry Cooper. "Every stock down 20 per cent. And one still finds imbeciles who say this isn't a crisis."

"It is a crisis," said Jean Monnier.

And he went out.

"That one's been hit," said Harry Cooper.

"Yes," said Gertrude Miller, "he's gambled his shirt. Fanny told me so. She's going to leave him tonight."

"Tough luck for him," said Harry Cooper.

The beautiful bronze doors of the elevator slid open.

"Down," said Jean Monnier.

The whole of the little fortune amassed in Arizona had been advanced for margin in his stock transactions. He was through. In the street, hurrying for his train, he tried to imagine the future. If Fanny withheld her blow, it was not impossible. He remembered his first struggles, his rapid rise. After all, he was barely thirty. But he knew Fanny would be merciless and she definitely was.

When he woke up alone the next morning, he felt drained of all courage. Despite Fanny's harshness, he had loved her. The maid served his melon and cereal, and blandly asked for money.

He gave her fifteen dollars, then cast up his accounts. He had left a little less than $600. It was enough to live on for one, perhaps two, months. After that? He looked out the window. Almost every day for a week there had been stories of suicides in the newspapers. Bankers, stock salesmen, speculators chose death to a battle already lost. A fall of twenty stories? How many seconds? Three, four . . . then that quashing on the pavement. But if the shock did not kill him? He imagined atrocious sufferings, his limbs broken, his flesh crushed to pulp. He sighed, then, a newspaper under his arm, went to lunch at a restaurant, where he was surprised to find how good pancakes flooded with maple syrup still tasted.

"Thanatos Palace Hotel . . . New Mexico . . . Who is writing to me from that bizarre address?"

Below three engraved cypresses, he read:

THANATOS PALACE HOTEL

Manager: Henry Boerstecher

Dear Sir:

If we approach you today, it is not by chance but because we have information about you which permits us to think and to hope that our services may be of some use to you.

You certainly cannot but have noticed that, in the life of the most courageous man, there may arise circumstances so completely inimical that further struggle becomes impossible and the idea of death comes to seem a deliverance.

To close the eyes, to sleep, never to wake again, to hear no more questions or reproaches. . . . Many of us have fashioned this dream, formulated this wish. However, aside from a few cases, men do not dare to flee their ills, and this is understandable when one observes those among them who

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have tried to do it. For most suicides are frightful frustrations. Someone who has attempted to shoot himself through the head succeeds only in severing the optic nerve and making himself blind. Someone else, who has thought of going to sleep after poisoning himself with some compound, makes a mistake in measuring the dose and wakes up, three days later, brain liquefied, memory gone, limbs paralyzed. Suicide is an art that does not permit mediocrity nor amateurism, and which, moreover, by its very nature does not allow the acquisition of experience.

This experience, if, as we believe, the problem interests you, we are ready to put at your disposal. Proprietors of a hotel situated at the frontier of the United States and Mexico, freed of all troublesome control by the desert-like character of the region, we have believed it our duty to offer to those of our fellow-men who, for serious and irrefutable reasons, wish to quit this life, the means of doing it without suffering and, we almost dare write, without danger.

At the Thanatos Palace Hotel, death will come in your sleep and in the most peaceful manner. Our skillful technique, acquired in the course of fifteen years of uninterrupted success (we received more than 2000 visitors last year), permits us to guarantee a minute dose and immediate results. We may also add that, for clients affected by legitimate religious scruples, we put an end to things by an ingenious method, and, if you honor us by turning to us, relieve you of all moral responsibility.

It is important to add that Thanatos is situated in a region of great natural beauty, that it has four tennis courts, an eighteen-hole golf course, and a beautiful swimming pool. Its clientele being composed of persons of both sexes who almost all belong to a refined social milieu, the social delights of the sojourn are incomparable. Travelers are requested to get off at Deeming, where the hotel automobile will meet them. They are asked to announce their arrival by letter or cable at least two days in advance. As for the fee, the sum of $300 will cover your entire expenses. . . .

The hotel was built in Spanish-Indian style, very low, with terraced roof and red walls of a cement crudely simulating clay. The rooms faced south on an open vista, streets like those of a great city, flower-lined boulevards.

Henry Boerstecher, the manager, was a quiet man with gold-rimmed glasses, very proud of his establishment.

"The hotel belongs to you?" asked Jean Monnier.

"No. The hotel belongs to a corporation, but it was my idea, and I am manager for life."

"And how is it that you don't have the gravest difficulties with the local authorities?"

"Difficulties?" said Mr. Boerstecher, surprised and shocked. "But we do nothing that is contrary to our duties as hotel-keepers. We give our clients what they want, everything they want, nothing more. Besides, there is no local authority here. The boundary is so loosely defined in this territory that no one knows exactly what is Mexico and what the United States."

"And the families of your clients never prosecute you?"

"Prosecute us!" exclaimed Mr. Boerstecher indignantly. "And why, in heaven's name? In what court? The families of our clients are only too happy to see liquidated without publicity affairs that are delicate and at the same time almost always painful. Would you like to see your room? It will be, if you really wish it, Room 113. You are not superstitious?"

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"Not at all," said Jean Monnier. "But in this connection, I ought to tell you that I have been reared religiously and that the idea of suicide is repugnant to me."

"It is not a question of suicide," said Mr. Boerstecher in a tone so peremptory that his interlocutor did not insist. "Sarconi, you will show Mr. Monnier 113. As for the $300, if you would be good enough to pay in advance in passing the cashier's office, next to mine here."

It was in vain in Room 113, bathed in a beautiful sunset, that Jean Monnier looked for traces of death-dealing machines.

"What time is dinner?"

"At eight-thirty, sir," said the valet.

"Is it necessary to dress?"

"Most of the gentlemen do, sir."

"Very well! I'll dress. Get out a black tie and white shirt."

When he went down to the lobby, he saw, indeed, that the women were in décolleté and the men in dinner jackets. Mr. Boerstecher appeared, officious but perfectly deferential.

"Ah! Mr. Monnier! I was looking for you. Since you are alone, I thought perhaps you would find it pleasant to share your table with one of our clients, Mrs. Kerby-Shaw."

Monnier made a gesture of ennui.

"I did not come here," he said, "to lead a worldly life. However, that depends. Can you show me this lady without presenting me?"

"Certainly, Mr. Monnier. Mrs. Kerby-Shaw is the young woman in the silver-spangled gown sitting near the piano looking through a magazine. I don't think that her physical aspect can displease. Far from it. And she is an extremely pleasant woman, with good manners, intelligent, an artist."

Certainly Mrs. Kerby-Shaw was a very pretty woman. Her hair, arranged in little curls, was drawn into a low knot at the nape of her neck to reveal a high and vigorous forehead. Her eyes were soft and intelligent. Why the devil did such a charming being want to die?

"Is Mrs. Kerby-Shaw . . . that is, is that lady one of your clients on the same terms and for the same reason as I?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Boerstecher, and he seemed to charge the adverb with a heavy significance. "Certainly."

"Then present me."

After dinner Jean Monnier spent the entire evening in a small deserted salon, whispering words to Claire Kerby-Shaw which seemed to move her. Before going up to his room, he sought out Mr. Boerstecher. He found the manager in his office, a large black register open before him. Mr. Boerstecher was checking his accounts, and, from time to time, with a stroke of a red pencil, he struck out a line.

"Good evening, Mr. Monnier. Can I do something for you?"

"Yes, Mr. Boerstecher. . . . At least I hope so. . . . What I have to say is going to be a surprise. . . .

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Such a sudden change . . . but that is the way life is. . . . In short, I have come to tell you I don't want to die."

Mr. Boerstecher raised his eyes.

"Are you serious, Mr. Monnier?"

"I know very well," said the Frenchman, "that I am going to seem incoherent and indecisive. But isn't it natural that if circumstances change, your desires also change? Eight days ago, when I received your letter, I felt desperate, alone in the world. I didn't think life's struggle was worth the trouble to be enterprising. Today everything is changed. And fundamentally, thanks to you."

"Thanks to me, Mr. Monnier?"

"Yes, because the young woman whom you seated across from me at the table is the one who has performed the miracle. Mrs. Kerby-Shaw is a delightful woman."

"I told you so, Mr. Monnier."

"Delightful and heroic. Told of my miserable situation, she really wanted to accept and to share it. Does that surprise you?"

"Not in the least. We are used to these sudden changes here. And I am glad, Mr. Monnier. You are young."

"There remains only the settlement of a rather delicate question. The $300 which I have advanced and which constitutes almost all I have in the world, has it been irrevocably paid over to Thanatos, or may I, to buy our tickets, recover a part?"

"We are honest people, Mr. Monnier. Tomorrow morning the cashier's office will prepare your bill, and the remainder will be returned to you."

"You are most courteous and generous. Ah! Mr. Boerstecher, what gratitude I owe you! Happiness rediscovered! A new life!"

"At your service," said Mr. Boerstecher.

He watched Jean Monnier make his exit and disappear. Then he pressed a button and said:

"Send me Sarconi."

After several minutes the porter appeared.

"You asked for me, Signor Manager?"

"Yes, Sarconi. It will be necessary to turn on the gas in 113 this evening . . . about two o'clock in the morning."

As the porter went out, Mrs. Kerby-Shaw appeared at the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Boerstecher. "I was about to call you. Your young and charming client has just been in to announce his impending departure."

"It seems to me," she said, "that I deserve compliments. That was quick work."

"Very quick. I have taken that into account."

"Then it is set for tonight?"

"It is set for tonight."

"Poor boy," she said. "He was sweet, romantic."

"They are all romantic."

"All the same, you are cruel," she said. "It's exactly at the moment when they regain a taste for life that you do away with them."

"Cruel? On the contrary, it is in

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that that the humanity of our method lies."

He consulted his register.

"Tomorrow, rest, but day after tomorrow I have a new arrival for you. It's another banker, but a Swede this time. And this one is no longer very young."

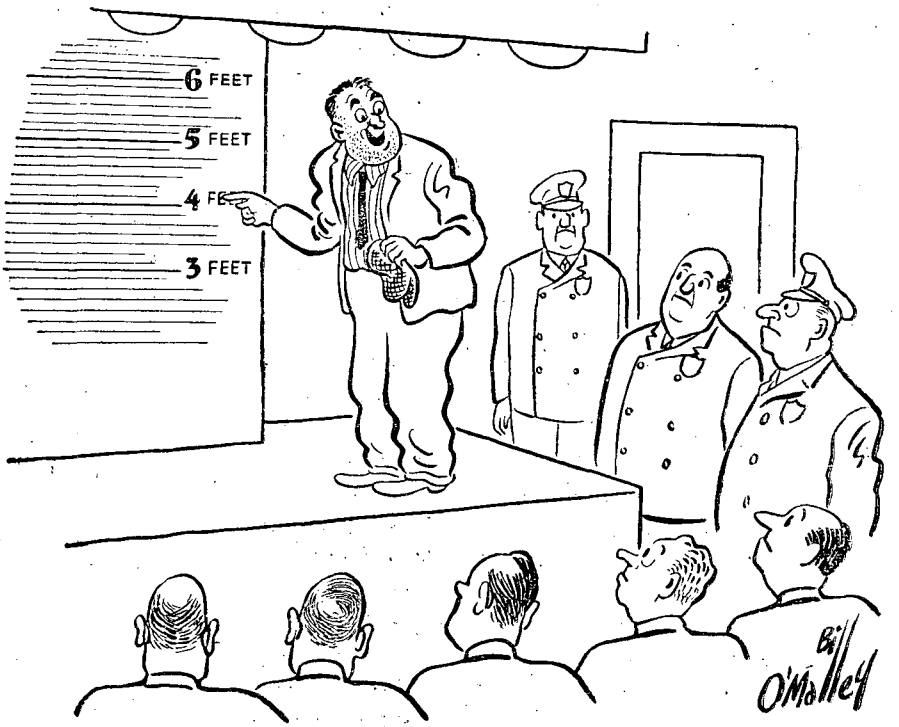
"I really liked the little Frenchman," she said, dreamily.

"One doesn't choose one's work," said the manager severely. "Here, here are your ten dollars, plus a two-dollar premium."

"Thank you," said Claire Kerby-Shaw.

As she placed the bills in her bag, she sighed.

When she had gone, Boerstecher looked for his red pencil. Then, carefully, using a little metal ruler, he struck a name from his register. . . .



"Remember when I just came up to there?"

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Barry Perowne first read E. W. Hornung's stories about Raffles when he was, at the tender age of eight, an inmate of Gosport Prison. He had been living, in the absence of both his parents who were serving overseas in World War I, with a worthy couple residing in Portsmouth. The husband of the couple was a sparring partner to the British heavyweight champion, Joe Beckett, then in training for his fight with Georges Carpentier. Well, one day young Perowne ran away from home and got as far as Lee-on-the-Solent, where he was picked up by a suspicious bobby and led by the ear to Gosport Gaol. The lad-on-the-lam refused to divulge his name, so he was given bread and butter, a mug of cocoa, and some books to read — Hesketh Prichard's DON Q *and* THE CASES OF INSPECTOR WEST-MACOTT *(which your Editors have never succeeded in tracking down) and* RAFFLES. *The boy sat up all night devouring* RAFFLES, *and perhaps, because of the unusually susceptible circumstances, the Hornung book made a lasting impression on his sensibilities. Before the night was out, he determined on a future career as a gentleman-burglar.*

The next evening, his pugilist guardian turned up, wearing his familiar checked cap and turtleneck sweater, his ears much eroded, and his Easter Island face embellished with criss-crosses of court-plaster. But the running-away brought an end to Barry's living with the fisticuff-man, and he was forced to say farewell to all the pictures of John L. Sullivan, Jess Willard, and Jack Johnson, and sent to his uncle who owned a livery stable in town. Now, near the livery stable was the old house where Conan Doyle had written his first Sherlock Holmes story, and after hearing many anecdotes about the big, hearty doctor, young Barry found himself torn between becoming a gentleman-crook and a gentleman-detective. He spent most of his time concealed in the stable, reading and rereading the adventures of Raffles and Sherlock, finding it harder and harder to make up his mind. Finally, he decided to become a writer, and through writing live both lives — for, vicariously, he could be both a cracksman and a criminologist.

Then later, when he was past twenty and already launched on his writing career, he went to live at an old inn in the New Forest. There he was taken to a fascinating house which he learned from the caretaker to be Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's. That gave him one of the greatest thrills of his life. Many a morning, as he sat writing in the old pub, he used to peer out through the

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leaded panes under the thatched and dripping eaves, and see a burly, elderly, white-mustached man striding vigorously across the winter heath; and it seemed to Barry Perowne that the world was indeed full of bright wonder and queer chance and deep magic, and that the true wine of life was blue-black ink.

A few years later, in Majorca, he received a cable from a London editor, offering him a strange assignment. The editor had conceived the idea of reviving Raffles in modern form. Immediately, Barry Perowne's mind flew back to that night in Gosport Gaol, and it seemed to him that many odd convergences — wheels within wheels — had linked his life permanently with that dashing, chivalrous cracksman of old. Arrangements were quickly made with the Executors of the Hornung Estate, and Mr. Perowne began to resurrect Raffles and his worshipful amanuensis and chronicler, Bunny. And as the years went by, Mr. Perowne wrote nearly a million words about Raffles and Bunny, and enjoyed every one of them.

Then, out of the blue sky, the auctorial heir of Hornung received a suggestion from your Editors: Why not, we asked, resume the Raffles stories, not in modern dress as Mr. Perowne had been writing them, but as nearly as possible in the true Hornung period, with that genuine aura of decadence and fin-de-siècle flavor which stills hangs over the original Hornung tales? The reviver of Raffles, despite his now vast intimacy with the character, had misgivings. Could he really do it? — the authentic Raffles, with his flair and flash, with his hedonism and public-school spirit, with his nonchalance and his nerve?

Well, here it is: a reverent and reverie-like pastiche of the one and only Raffles. But the author, Barry Perowne, can't help wondering: Whatever is he going to say when, in the fullness of the hereafter, he finally meets Mr. Hornung?

A COSTUME PIECE

by BARRY PEROWNE

IN THE COCKNEY PHRASE, IT WAS "Queen's weather." From a cloudless blue sky, the sun blazed down on the multi-windowed pile of Buckingham Palace. The royal standard shimmered red and gold in visible heat currents. Her Majesty was in residence, receiving distinguished

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guests to the midsummer military manuœvres due to begin on the morrow.

From the balcony of my club near Carlton House Terrace, I looked down on the trees, vividly green, which lined the broad, straight Mall. Holding back a multitude of spectators, twin ranks of the Brigade of Guards were rigid in scarlet coats and towering bearskins, their bayonets torrid points of dazzle.

Fanfares, cannonading, and roars of welcome greeted the appearance of Europe's kings and princes in a martial setting of square-jawed chiefs-of-staff and debonair aides-de-camp, with sovereigns' escorts clattering in advance and in the rear.

Polished hooves drummed an intricate tattoo on woodblocks and melting asphalt as I looked down on the successive groups passing in a splendour of brass-glinting helmets and gold-gleaming spurs, of jewel-flashing orders and gemmed sword-hilts.

"Kings' ransoms," I told myself enviously, over and over — and I fingered the five miserable coppers in the pockets of my Savile Row trousers and wondered where on earth Raffles was.

Intuition told me that he must be somewhere among the crowd, taking note of the plunder, marking down his quarry. Impossible to believe that he would not seek to improve this shining hour! But in what guise might he be? He had so many. He revelled in what he called "a costume piece." He was capable of as many impersonations as a music-hall artist.

I searched the crowd below in the Mall for some glimpse of him. The crowd was family England in its Sunday best. Overheated small boys in naval suits and straw sailor hats sucked sticks of "rock"; ladies in bustled dimity and sprigged muslin twirled their sunshades with a refined languour; flushed gentlemen lifted silk hats to mop brows glistening with perspiration and pomade. With Europe currently in a period of tension, one and all were eager to catch a glimpse of the monarch who disquieted a continent.

When, at last, he approached, it was to a scatter of cheers grown meagre and dubious. That he was aware of this diminished delight, and scorned it, I had no doubt as I watched him pass in the midst of his sovereign's escort. His face was a grey, harsh mask of hauteur; his jet moustache was twisted up to points under his eyes; his spiked helmet flashed in the sun; his withered arm was thrust into the breast of his tunic. A falling hush accompanied his progress up the Mall toward the Palace.

His passing was the climax of the morning, the signal for a flow of movement in the Mall. Eager husbandmen with small barrows hastened out to glean where foreign horses had sown an alien corn to the enrichment of sylvan England. From the crowded balcony of my club, where on this special day ladies were tolerated, a drift started through the French

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windows to the dining-room for luncheon.

Fingering my wretched coppers, I stayed where I was. To seat myself in the dining-room would be only to invite a whispered excommunication from the old headwaiter. My credit was blown. And it was in vain that I sought to catch — as it were, casually — the eyes of opulent acquaintances.

No genial voice cried, "Are you lunching, Manders? Come and pick a chop with me."

Most members, today, had resting caressingly on their sleeves the slender, gloved fingers of feminine guests. Those who had not were confirmed curmudgeons, or paupers like myself, or gruel-fed dodderers briefly resurrected from bath-chairs to quaver plaudits at a royal occasion.

I swung my stick moodily between my fingers, gazing down on the flow of saunterers and brilliance of banners along the Mall. Savoury aromas and convivial cork-poppings tantalized me from the dining-room. I was vulgarly ravenous. Prolonged deprivation had given me a figure on which my frockcoat never had sat better, but had brought no corresponding sense of well-being. A crust of bread and a cup of weak coffee full of grounds had been my breakfast. I had been seeking Raffles all morning without success.

I wanted to apologize for the lofty platitudes I had flung at him a few months before, when I had severed our felonious relationship. One of his burglarious exploits had brought us precious close to disaster; and I had mistaken my aftermath of tremors for the stirring of a belated virtue. My pockets full of my share of the loot, I had had the hypocrisy to reproach Raffles for his way of life. And when he only chuckled, I had flung out the Albany, where he had his rooms, vowing that I would earn an honest living by my pen.

I blushed for myself, now. My pen had proved a broken reed. I had been obliged to move from my pleasant flat in Mount Street to a hideous garret near Tattersall's. On the one or two occasions when I had seen Raffles since our rupture, he had been his usual friendly self. But he had made no suggestion that I rejoin him, and I had lacked the effrontery to propose it myself. Today, however, I was desperate, down to my last fivepence, hungry enough to eat the words I had flung at him. My garret was a litter of bills, sordid rejection slips, and pawn-tickets. There was no one but Raffles to whom I could turn. And I could not find him. I had been to the Albany; he was not there. I had been to Lord's Cricket Ground; he was not playing. I was convinced he was, or had been, somewhere among the crowd in the Mall, planning some coup; and the thought that I might be with him, lining my pockets, galled me.

I jammed on my silk hat, quit the balcony and the club, and strode again up St. James's Street to Piccadilly — and the Albany. By now, surely, Raffles must have returned.

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The porter shook his head.

"Sorry, Mr. Manders — haven't seen Mr. Raffles all day."

What was he doing?

Evening came. Eight o'clock. Nine o'clock. The white globes of gas-lamps shone in the purple dusk after the day's heat. I had been to all his usual haunts; I still had not found him. I was down to my last penny. I was at my wit's end. The West End was crowded, *en fête* for a night of kings. The sidewalks were thronged; hansoms and four-wheelers plied a roaring trade. Actual physical weakness compelled me to turn my footsteps toward my garret overlooking Tattersall's, scene of many a famous horse auction.

I abominated that garret. It reeked of the stables. My sleep in it, troubled enough, heaven knew, by dreams of Raffles' silk hat and black mask, his deft hands now busy with jemmy and skeleton key, now clamped by manacles, was made a mockery by the clinking of restless hooves in the stalls below, by sudden kicks and midnight munchings. I loathed the garret for these night-alarms, for its meanness and mouse-droppings, and the sense it gave me of my degrading inability to gain a living without working.

Reluctantly, now, I walked past the grey-arched doors of Tattersall's, turned into the mean street where I had this garret. On the near corner was a baker's small shop, still open. On the opposite corner was a pub, jammed with redcoats roaring a chorus over their pots, while their admirers, seductive in ostrich-plumed hats, fastidiously sipped port-and-lemon.

I paused, fingering my penny, to peer into the baker's window. Here a broken gas-mantel, roaring bluely amid festoons of flypaper, lit a display of halfpenny rolls and Sally Lunns. I knew I ought to save my penny to put in my gas-meter. The light would be necessary if I were to write a description, scintillant with fancy and apt allusion, of the day's royal doings, to hawk round the Fleet Street editors tomorrow. But I was tempted by the baker's. I was torn between the claims of an appetite and a gas-meter, and as I stood there irresolute, a hand fell on my shoulder.

My heart gave a sick heave and sank to my boots. I awaited the long-dreaded formula, "I have to warn you, Manders, that anything you may say —" But this convention of doom remained unuttered. Instead, a voice said cheerfully:

"All alone, Bunny?"

I spun round. Tall, faultlessly frock-coated, a pearl in his cravat, his face clean-cut, handsome, his eyes grey and keen, A. J. Raffles stood smiling at me. I seized his hand. My spirits soared. The very silk hat he wore thrilled me with a memory of the unforgettable occasion when he had walked blandly out of the British Museum with, balanced on his head under that same topper, the priceless gold cup from the Etrurian Collection.

"This is a warm welcome, Bunny,"

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he said now, smilingly, as I wrung his hand.

"I've been hunting you all day long," I explained.

"Really?" He gave me a shrewd glance, but asked no question. Instead, he nodded at a dog which he was leading by means of a white handkerchief knotted to its collar. "Recognize him, Bunny?"

The dog, an elderly black spaniel, panted a sedate welcome at me.

"Surely," I said, "it's old J. Benjamin's dog?"

"Just so," said Raffles — "his dog named Captain. I had a fancy for a chat with old Benjamin, J., this evening, so I looked in at Florian's for a welsh rarebit and a tankard. They told me Mr. Benjamin had been in earlier, and gone. As I was leaving, I found Captain whining round the door, evidently on the stray. I thought I'd better take him in tow before some demon hansom bowled him over. They didn't know Mr. Benjamin's address, at Florian's, but I thought you might know, so I was coming to your lodgings. You're a particular friend of his —"

This was quite true. I was. But at his first mention of J. Benjamin, there had flashed into my mind a vivid vignette from the day's magnificence — an emperor with a grey face set in a rigour of arrogance, a withered arm thrust in his tunic, a jet moustache twisted up to his eyes, and two ramrod generals with spiked helmets for his grim, inseparable shadows.

I looked at Raffles with a sudden, excited conjecture. For between the emperor in the Mall and Florian's Restaurant round the corner there was a link, and a strange one. . . .

Florian's Restaurant, opposite Knightsbridge Barracks, was a dim little panelled place with leather-padded settles, a wealth of sporting prints from *Pickwick* and *Jorrocks*, and a pewter-laden sideboard. Since my decline and fall from Mount Street, I had been a frequent diner at Florian's, for its economy and its convenience to my garret.

Another regular at Florian's was a neat little man with a leathery, snub, wrinkled face, a severe upper lip, grey mutton-chop whiskers, and very blue eyes under bristly hair brushed straight down in a bang across his forehead. He wore always a square, brown, hard hat, a suit of covert cloth cut tight in the leg, and a heavy watch-chain embellished with small silver whips. Intuitively, I had associated him with horses.

He always came into Florian's in company with a sedate black spaniel — the very spaniel Raffles was now leading.

The old man and the oldish dog were a self-sufficient couple. Watching them in their booth at Florian's, the spaniel with flopping ears looking up unwinkingly at his master as he divided their joint dinner into two exact parts, to hand down the dog's share on a special plate, I had felt a liking for them. When the dog had licked the plate clean, groomed his

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chops with a connoisseur's tongue, and reflected upon the repast with the detached air of a bewigged judge savouring a redolent tit-bit of evidence, he always arose and gave the old man a prod of thanks by way of grace after eating.

I had not spoken to them until one night when, running into Raffles soon after our dissolution of partnership, I had taken him into Florian's to demonstrate a solvency in literature by buying him supper. The place chancing to be full, we had shared a booth with the old man with the dog. Perhaps because he was lonely, the old man had been communicative about himself, had introduced himself as Mr. Benjamin.

"Benjamin, J.," he had said. "I've got a younger brother — Benjamin, T."

The difference in age, it had transpired, between him and his "younger" brother was barely a year. And they were as like as "two peas in a pod." This happy circumstance had gained them employment in the stables of a sporting Duke, who, proud of his "spanking turnouts," liked the touch of uniformity provided by the brothers Benjamin on the jehu's box, in their white whipcord breeches, bottle-green livery coats, white stocks, and grey tophats with yellow cockades.

They had remained in the ducal service until their mutton-chop whiskers had grown as grey as their hats, when a turf miscalculation at Ascot and a baccarat catastrophe at Homburg had obliged the Duke to curtail his stables. Much of his bloodstock, auctioned at Tattersall's, had been bought *en bloc*.

"By order," said Benjamin, J., with a discreet cough as he fingered his watch-chain, "of a reigning monarch."

The fraternal coachmen had accompanied the horses on their journey abroad to the imperial stables, where the two diminutive, dignified men had made such a favourable impression that it had been intimated to the Duke that it would be convenient if he released them to the imperial service.

Settling down in the magnificence of the foreign capital, the brothers had lodged together near the palace stables; and, as seems to happen by a kind of fate to small men with mutton-chop whiskers and severe upper lips, both had conceived a passion for a bosomy blonde widow — their landlady.

"We fell out," Mr. Benjamin told us, patting his dog's head laid in sympathy on his knee, "over Emmy."

For a year and more they had been at daggers drawn — until suddenly the capricious widow had bundled them both out of the house and married an interloping farrier-sergeant.

"You'd 'ave thought this would 'ave 'ealed the breach," said Mr. Benjamin, "but not a bit of it. No, gentlemen. We blamed it on each other, and it rankled."

Matters had come to a head in a strange way. Late one snowy night, a landau had been ordered to report to

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a side door of the palace to take a passenger to the station to catch the St. Petersburg express. Benjamin, J., being on duty, had reported with the landau accordingly, and two men — one a civilian in a heavy black overcoat and black felt hat, wearing pince-nez and carrying a dispatch-case, the other a squat, thickset officer in spiked helmet and military cloak, known to Mr. Benjamin as Colonel Saxe — had emerged quickly from the side door of the palace. Colonel Saxe had told the coachman to wait a minute, there was a third person to come; and both men had ducked into the landau.

"The night was still," said Mr. Benjamin. "Just the flakes comin' down thick, an' sizzlin' on the 'ot brass of the coach-lamps, an' the 'osses givin' a thump an' jingle now an' then. The gentlemen seemed excited an' pleased with theirselves. They was talkin' away inside the landau while we waited. I'd been takin' lessons in the language from Emmy for a year, nigh on, to inwaygle myself. I could 'ear every word the gentlemen said, an' I could understand about 'alf of it."

What he had heard and understood had made Mr. Benjamin's stock feel tight about his throat, and his heart thump sultry, as he sat there on the box, a rug over his knees, the flakes whirling grey in the wan shine of the coach-lamps.

"You see, sirs," said Mr. Benjamin, "I'm English born — native of Sevenoaks — an' what I 'eard didn't bode no good to them at 'ome, an' I felt it ought to be knowed of in London."

So when the third person had emerged from the palace and ducked into the landau, and Mr. Benjamin had driven through the wide, deserted, snowy streets to the station, then back again — the Russian gentleman with pince-nez having been seen off on the St. Petersburg express — to set down the other two at the palace, Mr. Benjamin had gone on to the stables, put up his horses, and walked off through the night and the snow to the British Embassy.

"They listens to my story," said Mr. Benjamin, "then they ses, 'You're goin' to London, Mr. Benjamin, an' you're goin' quick an' secret.' So I ses, 'What about Benjamin, T.?' There was no love lost between us, sirs, not since Emmy. Still, I didn't *'ate* 'im, not the way 'e 'ated me. An' when it got out where the leak come from, I didn't relish the thought of their takin' it out on 'im — bein' my brother, all said and done. The Embassy gent ses, 'Don't worry about 'im,' he ses. 'We'll give 'im the tip an' do as much for 'im as we're doin' for you. 'E won't be to London far be'ind you.' "

"They have ways and means," Raffles had murmured.

"Yessir," said Mr. Benjamin. "All the same, I bin back two years now, come Hallowe'en, an' ain't never 'eard a word from 'im from that day to this!"

"What happened?" Raffles had said, frowning.

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"All I know," said Mr. Benjamin, "when I got back an' told my story to various official gentlemen, they was uncommon put out by it, but they ses, 'You done right an' proper, Mr. Benjamin, an' we'll block that little manœuvre of 'Is Imperial Majesty 'ere an' now,' they ses. An' I reckon they done it, they was that vexed. What's more, they must've mentioned your 'umble servant to the Queen 'erself, for the next I know — God bless 'er — I'm awarded a pension an' a lifelong tenancy of one of the Queen's Grace and Favour 'ouses, in 'Er Majesty's personal gift."

"And you've never heard from your brother at all?" Raffles had said.

"No, sir. I was told the Embassy done like they promised, an' warned him an' offered to get 'im 'ome. But no," said Mr. Benjamin, " 'e refused. 'E said 'e wouldn't stoop to soil 'is 'ands with any doings of mine. 'E was like that, sir — after Emmy. Fair 'ated me, 'e did. Anything *I* done, that was wrong — an' '*e* 'ad to do the opposite. 'Let 'im go,' he ses, '*I'm* stayin' where I am.' An' 'e stayed. But I've often wondered whatever become of 'im," Mr. Benjamin had said, shaking his head, his blue eyes guileless under his bang. " 'Is Imperial Majesty was never one to take an injury without *somebody* payin' for it."

I thought of that grey, rigid face of hauteur I had seen today in the Mall — and I looked searchingly, now, at Raffles, in the dim light from the baker's window.

"Yes," I said, "Mr. Benjamin is a particular friend of mine. I've often talked to him at Florian's, since that night he told us about himself."

"Did he ever mention Colonel Saxe again?" said Raffles.

"Colonel Saxe?" I said. "No. Why?"

"I just wondered," Raffles said. "You know Mr. Benjamin's address?"

"Yes. It's a stone's throw from here," I said. "But, Raffles, what made you come looking for him tonight, particularly?"

"Just a fancy," he said. "I've been in the Mall today —"

I snapped my fingers. "I knew it!"

"Some pretty baubles, Bunny," he said, chuckling.

"And your fingers itched," I said, "particularly when His Imperial Majesty rode past, scorning everybody and everything! That's what made you think of Mr. Benjamin?"

"I had a fancy," said Raffles, "to hear him ramble and reminisce. These ex-royal servants know a lot about the habits of the exalted."

I drew in my breath. "Raffles," I whispered, "whatever you're planning, I'm with you!"

He threw an arm delightedly about my shoulders. "Had enough of the sheepfold, Bunny? Good man! Welcome home to the wolf lair! Not," he added, "that I'm planning anything. Just sniffing the air, eh? These purple midsummer nights, Bunny, with a hint of thunder in them — they make one tingle. A night of kings and diamonds!"

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A thrill fled up my spine. "Let's take the dog home," I said. "The old man's probably missed him. He'll be so relieved, he'll certainly ask us in. You can talk to him. Come on!"

We passed up a dark alley which brought us out opposite Knightsbridge Barracks, where in rooms yellow-lit behind rows of barred windows redcoats moved with glint of steel and gleam of brass, preparing to mount guard over the crowned heads of Europe. Nearby, on the side of the street on which we stood, was the dim little entrance of Florian's. Further down, to the right and on the opposite side, a bracket-lamp burned on the arch above the entrance to a courtyard.

"That's Park Yard," I told Raffles. "Benjamin, J., lives in Number Four."

Crossing the street, we passed under the arch with the bracket-lamp into a small, cobbled courtyard enclosed by six narrow little three-storey houses, attached and identical.

"These royalists are out seeing the sights," said Raffles. "Only one window has a light."

The light, in one of the two houses across the end, glimmered on a yellow front door with an iron knocker and the number 4.

"That's Mr. Benjamin's," I said, in relief, and I mounted the steps with Raffles behind me leading the dog.

I beat a tattoo with the knocker; the reverberations rang hollow through the dark courtyard. From the far side of the house, which backed on Hyde Park, came a jingling and clip-clopping of carriages. The dog whined, and Raffles, a step below me, stooped to pat him. The lighted window was close to my elbow; flowers in the window-box made a delicate, dark frescoe against the primrose glow through the drawn curtains. I heard no sound within the house.

"Try him again," Raffles said softly.

But as I raised my hand to the knocker, I heard the bolt shot and the chain rattle. The door opened. Mr. Benjamin's short, erect figure, in shirt-sleeves, his watch-chain draped across his checked waistcoat, appeared against the dim light within. He peered at us under his bang, his jaws moving on a mouthful.

"Good evening, Mr. Benjamin," I said cordially. "I'm afraid we've taken you away from your supper, but —"

Suddenly Raffles' hand was on my arm, gripping hard, checking me.

"We were passing, Mr. Benjamin," he said, "and thought you might be lonely and would like to come and see the sights with us. A big night in the West End! But perhaps," he added doubtfully, "it's a bit late for you — past your bedtime?"

"Sirs," said Mr. Benjamin, making valiant efforts to gulp his mouthful, "much appreciate. Unexpected — take it kindly. A bit late, per'aps — as you say —"

"Never mind," said Raffles cheer-

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ily. "Some other time. Just a passing thought. Good night, Mr. Benjamin."

"Good night to 'ee, gentlemen." Mr. Benjamin knuckled his bang. "An' thank'ee — honoured, I'm sure —"

Raffles' iron grip on my arm drew me down the steps. I heard the door closed and bolted behind us. I was totally bewildered by the transaction.

"But the dog, Raffles," I protested. "What —"

"Just so," said Raffles, "the dog. Didn't you notice?"

"Notice what?"

"That the dog didn't know his master," said Raffles, "and the master didn't know his dog!" I would have stopped dead, but his arm, now linked in mine, hurried me on out under the arch. "And look at this," he said. "I saw it lying on the steps when I stooped down to pat the dog."

His arm still linked in mine, as we crossed the street toward Florian's, he opened his hand. I saw on the palm a section of silver watch-chain embellished by miniature coach-whips.

"But Mr. Benjamin's chain wasn't broken," I said blankly. "He was wearing it. I saw it. He always wears it. He told me the Duke gave them both a half-hunter and chain when —" I stopped suddenly.

"Exactly," said Raffles, with a kind of icy vivacity. "The old fox! Coming to the door with his mouthful, to disguise any slight possible discrepancy of intonation — oh, pretty!"

I was thunderstruck. "You mean — that *wasn't our* Mr. Benjamin?"

"It was Mr. Benjamin, all right," said Raffles, "Mr. Benjamin, T.! Brother Jehu!" His tone was suddenly grim. "I'm afraid *our* Mr. Benjamin is now in alien hands — at the disposal of a monarch who never forgives an injury!"

He pushed open the door of Florian's.

At once, there was wafted to my nostrils the aroma of Florian's pies, those succulent concoctions of hare, beefsteak, kidneys, and mushrooms, swimming in a rich burgundy sauce and topped with a crisp, golden crust. My knees wavered. I knew that, before I could bring my mind to bear on the situation which confronted us, I must dine; and I said as much.

Raffles looked at me with concern. "My dear old chap, of course you must dine! I had no idea — Here, let's take this booth. Richmond!" He beckoned the old waiter, who, a napkin over his arm, hobbled up with such alacrity that his stiff dickey burst from his waistcoat. "The menu, Richmond, and the wine list."

"Yes, sir," said Richmond. "Still got Mr. Benjamin's dog, I see, sir."

"Yes, we're looking after him," said Raffles. "Bring him a bone or something, Richmond. He's a patient old dog."

"That he is," said Richmond, one side of his collar detonating from his stud as he stooped wheezingly to pat the dog. "I like to see them together — Mr. Benjamin and Captain. It does your 'eart good."

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I met Raffles' grey, keen eyes across the table.

He took out his cigarette-case, selected a Sullivan. While I ate, he leaned back in the settle, sending adrift at the gas-globe on the panelled wall those leisurely smoke-rings which always, with him, were the overt evidence of meditation.

Breaking a silence, he said, "You know, Bunny, I think I've always half expected something like this might happen — ever since Benjamin, J., told us his story, and mentioned Colonel Saxe."

His dark, fine head leaning back against leather, his silk hat gleaming on its hook above him, he narrowed his eyes at the drifting smoke-rings.

"As you know," he said, "I've always made it my business to keep informed as to who's who at the various Embassies. About eighteen months ago, one Colonel Saxe appeared in London, as an officer on the staff of the military attaché at the Embassy of His Imperial Majesty. In actual fact, Colonel Saxe's real function — as it is the function of some official or other in all Embassies — is clandestine intelligence. In short, he's in charge of the dirty work. When I heard Mr. Benjamin mention him as having been working at the Palace, at the fountain-head, I wondered whether the Colonel's banishment to an Embassy might not be due to the leak through Mr. Benjamin. One of His Imperial Majesty's moves on the European chessboard was spoiled by that leak, and he'd want someone's head on a charger for it. I fancy the Colonel may have paid the price — and the Colonel is no man to forgive an injury, either!"

He relapsed into thought. Richmond brought the ripe, napkin-wrapped Stilton. He set it down with a slight snapping sound as he shed a rear trouser-button. Raffles crushed out his Sullivan, called for ink and paper. He dipped a pen in the ink-bottle, began to write.

His pen scratched swiftly in the quiet. It was eleven o'clock by the ticking wall-clock, too early for the late-supper trade, and Florian's was almost empty. Monsieur Florian was clinking sovereigns in the cash-cage; imperfectly concealed by the frosted-glass screen before the service hatch, Richmond, patiently holding up his coat-tails, was having his button sewn on by Madame Florian. Captain rasped at his bone. Raffles folded his letter, tucked it into an envelope, glanced at me as he flicked the gummed edge along his tongue-tip.

"Feeling better, Bunny?"

"Ready for anything."

He nodded, started on a second letter. He sealed this one, addressed both envelopes, untied Captain from the leg of the settle. He walked up to the cash-cage, gave the envelopes to Monsieur Florian, together with some earnest instructions. Florian nodded his shock of grizzled hair.

"You there, Reechmon'!"

"Sir?" said Richmond, with a start that caused his bowtie to come undone and dangle.

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Raffles handed over Captain to him, and the old dog trotted off obediently with Richmond to the kitchen. Raffles came back to take his hat from the hook.

"Where are we going?" I said.

"To the Imperial Embassy," said Raffles. And in the hansom, bowling up toward Hyde Park Corner, he explained, "You can see what happened, Bunny. When it was realized that Benjamin, J., was responsible for the leak, Colonel Saxe would have had Benjamin, T., up on the carpet. Benjamin, T., would have denied any hand in the business, and he'd have revealed his hatred for his brother. The Colonel's a clever man. He'd have docketed that hatred, and Benjamin, T.'s, physical likeness to his brother, for reference. The Colonel would have had Benjamin, T., put aside to simmer till he could see how best to make use of him."

"And then?" I said.

"The Colonel is banished to an Embassy job," Raffles said. "Meantime, he hears how well Benjamin, J. — *our* Mr. Benjamin — has come off. A pension, a lifelong tenancy under the Queen's Grace and Favour. How His Imperial Majesty and the Colonel must have gritted their teeth over that! And then, Bunny, this imperial visit comes up, and the Colonel sees his chance. He arranges for Benjamin, T., to be brought over as a groom with the horses of the imperial suite. Then he puts his scheme to Benjamin, T. — that he take his brother's place, draw the Queen's pension, live rent-free for the rest of his life under the Queen's Grace and Favour, while his brother is shipped back in his place to face whatever punishment His Imperial Majesty may order privily meted out. Probably life imprisonment. The poetry of it, Bunny! Benjamin, T., spending the rest of his life as the Queen's pensioner, and Benjamin, J., the rest of *his* incarcerated secretly in His Imperial Majesty's dungeon! And no one the wiser. The imperial suite has diplomatic immunity. I doubt whether *our* Mr. Benjamin has ever been able to put more than X — his mark — as a receipt for his pension. Can't you see them chuckling, rubbing their hands — the Emperor, the Colonel, and the Vengeful Coachman? It's a score over the Queen. It's one in the eye for England. By Jove," said Raffles, "they were really deuced unlucky to trip up over the dog!"

"How do you think that happened?" I asked.

"Pretty obvious," said Raffles. "We know Mr. Benjamin and Captain went to Florian's for their dinner, as usual. When they came strolling back, the dog at Mr. Benjamin's heel, I fancy there must have been a four-wheeler drawn up in Park Yard. Our Mr. Benjamin walks up his steps, and is seized by the Colonel's men. The little chap must have put up a fight, to judge from that bit of broken watch-chain. But they bundle him into the four-wheeler, and away with him. Unluckily for them, nobody

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notices the dog, which is probably scared and bolts back to the only place it knows where it has friends, the place where I find him sniffing forlornly round the door — Florian's."

The hansom bowled round a corner just then, and there ahead, between the jogging ears of the horse, was a shine of lights from the lofty windows of the Imperial Embassy.

The hatch in the roof of our hansom opened. The cabbie screwed a purple face into the orifice to breathe down on us a reminiscence of breweries.

"Right up to the hentrance, sir?" he said.

"Right up to the entrance," said Raffles, and he handed up a coin. "There's another half-bar for you if you wait for us."

"You're a toff," said the cabbie.

He dropped the flap, his whip cracked, and we went past the waiting carriages at a jingling trot, to pull up with a flourish at the red carpet laid across the sidewalk under a canopy. Raffles threw back the apron. A flunkey gorgeous in knee-breeches hastened forward to hand him down.

The flunkey seemed taken aback by our morning dress. From the open windows of the second floor came the strains of an orchestra. A ball was in progress.

"Kindly inform Colonel Saxe," Raffles said to the flunkey, "that two gentlemen who prefer to be nameless are here to see him in the matter of the coachman's dog."

"The coachman's dog, sir?" said the flunkey.

"Just so," said Raffles.

The flunkey hesitated only for a moment. Then he motioned us to follow him. We mounted the steps, crossed a vast hall and were ushered into a spacious morning room.

I turned quickly to Raffles as the door closed. "What are you planning?" I said. I was uneasy; it seemed to me that we had thrust our heads gratuitously into the lions' den.

He put a warning finger to his lips. "An admirable likeness, Bunny," he said conversationally, and nodded toward a huge portrait in a gilt frame above the lofty marble mantelpiece.

The crystal door-knob rattled. The door opened and a squat, broad-shouldered man strode in. He had a jutting, ivory-hard jaw, heavily-pouched and stony eyes, and greying, thin hair brushed straight back from a massive forehead. He wore a dark blue uniform, the skin-tight trousers strapped under patent-leather shoes. Behind him was a tall, pale-faced, aquiline man, younger, with sleek black hair and a contemptuous expression, wearing a more striking uniform glittering with jewelled orders.

Raffles addressed the shorter man. "Good evening, Colonel Saxe."

The Colonel stood with legs straddled, his hands behind him, his jaw jutting pugnaciously. "You have the advantage of me, sir," he said harshly.

"And I propose," Raffles said, in an icy voice, "to use it. I give you two minutes, Colonel, to produce the person of Her Majesty's subject, Mr. J. Benjamin."

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The squat Colonel stood as though rooted. I did not breathe. So still was the great room that the ticking of the marble clock on the mantelpiece was audible.

The Colonel broke the silence with an effort. "Sir," he said thickly, "you are talking in riddles."

"A riddle of two coachmen, Colonel," said Raffles. "You're unlucky in your agents. They bungled their job. They substituted T. Benjamin for J. Benjamin, but they overlooked J. Benjamin's dog. The dog unmasked the impostor. Unfortunate for you, Colonel. That dog is now in safe hands, for delivery to Scotland Yard, together with a letter exposing your manœuvre, in the event that my friend here and I do not report back, bringing Mr. J. Benjamin, by midnight precisely."

A vein swelled, throbbing, on the Colonel's massive brow. "Who are you?" he said hoarsely.

"Private gentlemen," Raffles said, "and, I trust, sportsmen. You've played and lost. We've no desire to make trouble. Whether a certain august personage —" he glanced fleetingly at the portrait above the mantelpiece — "is aware of your manœuvre, or whether it's a brilliant bit of initiative on your own part, you know better than I. You are also in a better position to judge of the possible effects, diplomatically, if this unfortunate affair should become publicly known."

The Colonel opened his mouth, closed it. His neck thickened, flushing darkly, above the tight, gold-crusted collar of his uniform. Suddenly he turned on his gorgeous lieutenant.

"Your bungling," said the Colonel. "Your mismanagement, you titled nincompoop! This is what happens when they send me high-well-born halfwits as recruits to Intelligence! Get out! Get the man. Bring him here."

The blue, close-set eyes of the younger man glittered as icily as the gemmed orders on his breast. But without a word he clicked his heels and strode from the room. Colonel Saxe walked across the parquet floor, his heavy shoulders hunched, his hands clasping and unclasping behind his back. He turned on the hearthrug, his pouched, stony eyes on Raffles.

"As you have said, sir," said Colonel Saxe, speaking with difficulty, "I have played and lost. I am prepared —" he breathed hard through his nose — "I am prepared, in order to ensure that this affair remains between ourselves, to meet any reasonable monetary claim you may —"

"Sir," Raffles said dangerously, "do you take us for common blackmailers? I have the honour to inform you that this matter will go no further, except in one event."

"And that event?"

"Any interference hereafter," Raffles said, "with the private life of Mr. J. Benjamin, retired under the Queen's Grace and Favour."

The Colonel ground his teeth. "You have my word, sir."

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"Then you have mine, sir," said Raffles. "As to Benjamin, T., he is your responsibility. It would seem advisable to remove him from Park Yard without delay."

"He will be removed," said the Colonel.

I was astonished at Raffles' remark about Benjamin, T. But I had no time to reflect upon it, for the door opened, and there — with the Colonel's glittering and furious lieutenant behind him — stood our Mr. Benjamin, with his respectable mutton-chop whiskers, turning his square brown hard hat round and round in his gnarled coachman's hands. Except for the dangling end of his broken watch-chain, and for the fact that an extensive area round his left eye, under his bang, was turning rapidly black, he seemed none the worse.

"Gentlemen!" he exclaimed, when he saw us. "You here?"

Colonel Saxe gave a savage jerk at a bell-pull to the right of the mantelpiece. "I need not detain you further," he said harshly.

With Mr. Benjamin between us, we followed a flunkey back across the hall, out onto the red carpet. Our hansom, with the purple-faced old ruffian in the debauched topper on the box, jingled up instantly. We mounted, and, as the horse clip-clopped off, the cabbie lifted the flap in the roof to treat us to a blast of malted vapours.

"Where to, sir?"

"Through Hyde Park," said Raffles. "Pull up at the back of Park Yard, near the Barracks. And drive like fury!"

The cabbie cracked his whip. For a moment, I was at a loss to understand Raffles' sudden air of urgency. He was glancing back, now, through the rear oval window of the hansom.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Benjamin, "I ain't altogether clear about what's bin 'appenin' — except my brother, Benjamin, T., is in it some way. Whatever 'e may feel about me, sirs, an' whatever 'e's bin up to, I wouldn't like nothing to 'appen to 'im."

"That's all right, Mr. Benjamin," said Raffles cheerfully. "Don't you worry about a thing."

Suddenly the reason for Raffles' haste dawned on me. It was not that he thought we might be followed, but that he knew the Colonel would waste no time in having Benjamin T., brought in. Raffles had made a mistake in reminding the Colonel that a scapegoat for his failure was conveniently at hand. He had forgotten that our Mr. Benjamin, goodhearted little man that he was, would wish no harm to befall his "younger" brother. Raffles was anxious, now, to repair that slip he had made, and to warn Benjamin, T., before the Colonel's men came to Park Yard for him.

Sure enough, Raffles said, "Have you got a back door, Mr. Benjamin — a door on the Park side?"

"Yessir."

"Got a key to it?"

"Yessir."

"Give it to me," Raffles said.

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"Good." He lifted the hatch. "When we get out at Park Yard," he told the cabbie, "you'll drive Mr. Benjamin round to Florian's Restaurant." He dropped the hatch. "You hear, Mr. Benjamin? You're to wait for us at Florian's. You'll find Captain there."

The hansom swung to the right, round the Achilles statue. A sudden lilac flare in the sky westward lit the trees in the park to brief, black silhouette. A roll of thunder trundled across the sky, and was detonating overhead as the hansom reined in at the back of Park Yard. Raffles leaped out, with myself close behind him. The hansom moved off at once, with Mr. Benjamin; and Raffles darted across a strip of lawn to the railing at the back of Mr. Benjamin's house. A gate in the railing gave on a short flight of steps leading down to a back door. Thunder was squeezing the first fat rain drops down on us as Raffles unlocked the door.

He stepped in, struck a match, held it aloft. We were in a narrow passage leading to a short flight of stairs. Raffles led the way up the stairs, dropped the spent match, struck another. Its reflection glimmered redly in the glass of many photographs, in Oxford frames, of the Benjamin brothers on the boxes of phaetons, dogcarts, traps, landaus, victorias, and shooting-brakes. The walls of this tiny hall were covered with them; and over a shelf laden with silver cups and faded blue ribands, an imposing mezzotint of Her Majesty presided with benign approval in a draping of red-white-and-blue bunting.

I had expected Raffles to wake and warn T. Benjamin at once. But he did not. Instead, I saw a triangle of lightning, electric-blue, where Raffles, having dropped the match, was holding the window-curtain aside to peer out into the courtyard.

"Here they come," he said. "Bunny, feel for the bolt of the door. When the knock comes, open instantly!"

I was at a loss to divine his intention, but I felt for the door, found it, slipped the bolt and chain. I waited tensely, my hand on the knob, and listened. The thunder reverberated over the Queen's Grace and Favour house. A fierce deluge was slashing down in the courtyard. Then I heard the clack of hooves on cobbles, the rumble of a four-wheeler. Footsteps ran up to the door; the knocker was furiously pounded. I jerked the door wide.

Against the dim glow from the four-wheeler's lamps, swimming in the downpour, I saw a tall figure in a dark military cloak.

"Benjamin?" a voice said peremptorily.

Raffles' hand shot out, clamped on the breast of the cloak, jerked the man in.

"For Mr. Benjamin's black eye," said Raffles, and I heard the thud of his fist as he struck. "Bolt that door, Bunny!"

I had it bolted in an instant.

"Strike a match!"

I struck one. Raffles was down on

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one knee beside the sprawling figure of the aquiline, pale-faced, contemptuous man with the sleek black hair who had been present at our interview with Colonel Saxe.

"I fancied the Colonel would send this fellow," said Raffles, "and that he'd lose no time about it, if I jogged his mind a little!" He threw open the unconscious man's cloak, and jewelled orders on the breast of his tunic caught the match-flame with a faceted, dazzling radiance. I saw the sheen of Raffles' silk hat as he glanced up at me with the smile I knew so well. "It would have been gross neglect," said Raffles, "not to provide this walking jeweller's window with a little reception committee!"

His hands moved the glittering tunic with the deft certainty of a master craftsman. The match burned my fingers. I dropped it. Simultaneously, above the cannonading of thunder overhead, and the lash of the downpour, a shout rang out from the courtyard. Feet stamped up the steps. The doorknob rattled. The knocker was pounded violently.

"His men must have noticed something," said Raffles, and I heard his chuckle ironic in the darkness. "All right, Bunny, it's a clean sweep and a rich haul. Come on! Out the back way!"

Even as shoulders were hurled with dislocating vigour against the front door, we regained the Park by way of the back. The thunder rumbled in reluctant retreat across the sky, taking with it the night's heat. Through the slackening rain and the refreshed foliage, the globes of the gas-lamps shone white and clear. I felt braced and uplifted, alike by the cleansed air, by the sense of a sterile rectitude irrevocably shed, by the resumption of a felonious compact with my friend, and — not least — by the thought of what he carried in his impeccable pockets.

I trod the London asphalt with a step more buoyant than for months past. And it was not until, after a circuitous walk, we were approaching Florian's, where Mr. Benjamin and his spaniel awaited us, that a monstrous omission occurred to my mind. In my consternation, I stopped dead.

"Raffles! What about Benjamin, T.?"

Raffles' gesture dismissed an irrelevance. "Miles away by now," he said. "He was warned earlier in the evening — not that he deserved it. But that was the second letter I wrote — for Richmond to push under the door of the Queen's Grace and Favour house while we were at the Embassy."

I drew in a deep breath. "Raffles," I said, "I take off my hat to you."

"Thank you, Bunny," he said, but I saw his slight frown. "I can tell you one thing, though —"

"Yes?"

"I was devilish annoyed when Colonel Saxe offered us his disgusting bribe. He may be an officer," added A. J. Raffles, as he pushed open the door of Florian's, "but he doesn't know a gentleman when he sees one."

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More of Harry Kemelman's thoughts and theories on 'tec technique: At first sight, says Mr. Kemelman, it would appear that the classical detective story is a game of "Guess Who?" which the author plays with the reader. This view, in Mr. Kemelman's opinion, is absolutely false. The reader's psychological reaction to a game is entirely different from his psychological reaction to a story. In a mental game we derive our pleasure and satisfaction from solving the problem. But in a detective story, if we succeed in guessing the identity of the villain before the author tells us, we are apt to disparage the author's skill — in the same way that we disparage the skill of a stage magician if we see through his tricks . . .

The truth is (if we may venture our own opinion), most readers make no real attempt to solve the problem ahead of the author's own revelation. And for most readers, this is as it should be: the primary purpose of detective fiction is entertainment; if, in addition to enjoyment and escape, you also wish to sharpen your wits in a duel with the author, so be it — but this honing of the mind is purely a plus value, an extra dividend, a bonus for your investment of time and money. . . .

THE TEN O'CLOCK SCHOLAR

by HARRY KEMELMAN

I DO NOT THINK IT WAS A STRONG sense of justice that prompted Nicky Welt to come to my assistance on occasion, after I left the Law Faculty to become County Attorney. Nor as Snowden Professor of English Literature at the university would his interests be likely to lie in the functions of my office. Rather, I think, it was a certain impatience of mind — like that of the skilled mechanic who chafes as he watches the bungling amateur and at last takes the wrench from his hand with a "Here, let me do it."

Nevertheless, I felt that he enjoyed these brief excursions from the narrow routine of lecturing and grading papers, and when he invited me to attend a doctoral examination, I felt that it was his way of thanking me and reciprocating.

I was busy at the time and loath to accept, but it is hard for me to refuse Nicky. He was only two or three years older than I, but his prematurely white hair (my own was only just beginning to gray at the temples) and his lined, gnome-like face made him appear many years my senior; and perhaps for that reason it seemed natural for him to treat me with a

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certain condescension, and equally natural for me to accord him the deference that complemented it.

But a three-hour doctor's oral can be very dull if you are not yourself the candidate, or at least a member of the examining committee. So I temporized.

"Who is the candidate, Nicky?" I asked. "One of your young men? Anyone I know?"

"A Mr. Bennett — Claude Bennett," he replied. "He has taken some courses with me, but he is not working in my field."

"Anything interesting about his dissertation?" I continued.

Nicky shrugged his shoulders. "Since this is a preliminary examination according to the New Plan, we don't know what the dissertation subject is. In the last half-hour of the examination the candidate will announce it and outline what he hopes to prove. I understand from other members of the committee, however, that Mr. Bennett's interest is primarily in the Eighteenth Century, and that he is planning to do some work in The Byington Papers."

And now I thought I saw light. I suppose no university is really complete without a faculty feud. Ours was localized to the English Department, and the principals were our two Eighteenth Century specialists, Professor George Korngold, biographer of Pope, and Professor Emmett Hawthorne, discoverer and editor of The Byington Papers. And so bitter was the conflict between the two men that Professor Hawthorne had been known to walk out of meetings of learned societies when Korngold rose to speak, and Korngold had once declared in a sectional meeting of the Modern Language Association that The Byington Papers were a Nineteenth Century forgery.

I smiled knowingly. "And Korngold is on the committee?" Professor Hawthorne, I knew, was at the University of Texas for the semester, as an exchange professor.

Nicky's lips twisted into a most unscholarly smirk. "They're both on the committee, Korngold and Hawthorne."

I looked puzzled. "Is Hawthorne back?"

"We had a wire from him saying that he had made arrangements to return north early, ostensibly to check proof on the new edition of his book. But I consider it most significant that we got the wire shortly after Bennett's examination date was posted in the *Gazette*, and equally significant that he is due to arrive the night before the examination. Of course, we invited him to participate and he wired his acceptance." Nicky rubbed his hands with pleasure.

And although in the nature of things I did not expect to enjoy the proceedings quite as much as Nicky would, I thought it might be interesting.

Like many an anticipated pleasure, however, the actuality proved disappointing. The candidate, Claude Bennett, failed to appear.

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The examination was scheduled for ten o'clock Saturday morning, and I arrived in good time — about a quarter of — so as not to miss any part of the fun. The committee had already assembled, however, and I could detect from the general atmosphere, and more particularly from the way the members were grouped as they stood around and gossiped, that Korngold and Hawthorne had already had an exchange or two.

Professor Korngold was a large, stout man, with a fringe of reddish hair. His naturally ruddy complexion was exaggerated by a skin disorder, a form of eczema from which he suffered periodically. He smoked a large curved-stem pipe which was rarely out of his mouth, and when he spoke, the burbling of the pipe was a constant overtone to the deep rumble of his voice.

He came over to me when I entered the room and offering his hand, he bellowed, "Nicky said you were coming. Glad you could make it."

I took his outstretched hand with some reluctance for he was wearing a soiled cotton glove on the other to protect, or perhaps only to conceal, the broken skin where the eczema had penetrated. I withdrew my hand rather quickly, and to cover any awkwardness that might have resulted, I asked, "Has the candidate arrived yet?"

Korngold shook his head. He tugged at his watch chain and brought forth a turnip of a watch. He squinted at the dial and then frowned as he snapped the case shut. "Getting on to ten o'clock," he rumbled. "Bennett better not funk it again."

"Oh, he's been up before, has he?"

"He was scheduled to come up at the beginning of the semester, and a day or two before, he asked for a postponement."

"Does that count against him?"

"It's not supposed to," he said, and then he laughed.

I sauntered over to the other side of the room where Professor Hawthorne was standing. Hawthorne was a small, tidy man, with more than a touch of the dandy about him. He had pointed mustaches, and he was one of the few men in the university who wore a beard, a well-trimmed imperial. He also went in for pince-nez on a broad black ribbon, and even sported a cane, a slim ebony wand with a gold crook. All this since his discovery of The Byington Diary some few years ago, during a summer's study in England. He had been an ordinary enough figure before that, but the discovery of The Byington Papers had been hailed by enthusiasts as of equal importance to the deciphering of the Pepys Diary, and honors had come to him: a full professorship, an editorial sinecure with a learned publication, and even an honorary degree from a not too impossible Western college. And with it had come the imperial and the cane and the pince-nez on a ribbon.

"George Korngold being amusing at my expense?" he asked with seeming negligence.

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"Oh, no," I said quickly. "We were talking about the candidate. George said something about his having funked the examination once before."

"Yes, I suppose Professor Korngold would regard Bennett's request for a postponement as funking it," Hawthorne said ironically, raising his voice so that it was just loud enough to be heard across the room. "I happen to know something about it. And so does Professor Korngold, for that matter. It so happens that Bennett was working on The Byington Papers. Our library acquired the manuscript just a few days before Bennett was scheduled to stand for examination. As a real scholar, naturally he wanted a chance to study the original manuscript. So he asked for a postponement. That's what Korngold calls funking an exam."

From across the room the voice of George Korngold boomed out, "It's ten o'clock, Nicky."

Hawthorne glanced at his watch and squeaked, "It's only five of."

Korngold laughed boisterously, and I realized that he had only been baiting Hawthorne.

When five minutes later the clock in the chapel chimed the hour, Korngold said, "Well, it's ten o'clock now, Nicky. Do we wait till noon?"

Hawthorne waved his stick excitedly. "I protest, Nicky," he cried. "From the general attitude of one member of this committee the candidate has already been prejudged. I think in all fairness that member should disqualify himself. As for the candidate, I am sure he will be along presently. I stopped by at his hotel on my way down and found that he had already gone. I suppose he has dropped in at the library for a last minute check-up of some point or other. I urge that in all decency we should wait."

"I think we can wait a while, Emmett," said Nicky soothingly.

By a quarter past, however, the candidate had still not arrived, and Hawthorne was in a panic of anxiety. He wandered from one window to another looking out over the campus towards the library. Korngold, on the other hand, was elaborately at ease.

I think we all felt a little sorry for Hawthorne, and yet relieved, somehow, when Nicky finally announced, "It's half-past ten. I think we have waited long enough. I suggest we adjourn."

Hawthorne started to protest, and then thought better of it, and remained silent, gnawing on his mustache in vexation. As we all moved to the door, Korngold rumbled loud enough for all to hear, "That young man had better not plan on standing again for examination in this university."

"He may have an adequate excuse," Nicky ventured.

"The way I feel right now," said Korngold, "it would have to be something more than just an adequate excuse. Only a matter of life and death would justify this cavalier treatment of the examining committee."

Nicky had some work to do at the

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library, so I went back to my office. I had been there less than an hour when I was informed of the reason for Bennett's seeming negligence. He had been found dead in his room — murdered!

My first reaction, I recall, was the idiotic thought that now Bennett had an excuse that would satisfy even Professor Korngold.

I felt that Nicky ought to be notified, and my secretary tried to reach him several times during the afternoon but without success. When, at four o'clock, Lieutenant Delhanty, our Chief of Homicide, accompanied by Sergeant Carter who had also been working on the case, came to report on his progress, she still had had no luck.

Carter remained outside in the anteroom, in case he should be needed, while I led Delhanty into my office. Delhanty is a systematic man. He brought forth his notebook and placed it carefully on my desk, so that he could refer to it when necessary. Then he carefully drew up a chair and after squinting through his eyeglasses he began to read.

"At 10:45 we were notified by James Houston, manager of the Avalon Hotel, that one of his guests, a Claude Bennett, twenty-seven, unmarried, graduate student at the university, had been found dead by the chambermaid, a Mrs. Agnes Underwood. He had obviously been murdered. The call was taken by Sergeant Lomasney who ordered Houston to close and lock the door of the room and to await the arrival of the police.

"The Medical Examiner was notified and came out with us. We arrived at 10:50." He looked up from his notes to explain. "The Avalon is that little place on High Street across from the university gymnasium. It's more of a boarding house than a hotel, and practically all the guests are permanent, although occasionally they take a transient. There was a car parked in front of the entrance, a Ford coupe, 1937, registration 476-92-1. The key was in the ignition switch." He looked up again. "That turned out to be important," he said. He made a deprecatory gesture with his hand. "It's the sort of thing a policeman would notice — a parked car with the key in the switch. It's practically inviting someone to steal it. I made inquiries of the manager, Houston, and it turned out to be Bennett's car."

"Bennett's room was one flight up, just to the right of the stairs. The shades were drawn when we entered, and Houston explained that they had been found that way. Bennett was lying on the floor, his head bashed in by half a dozen blows from some blunt instrument. The Medical Examiner thought the first one might have done the trick, and the rest were either to make sure or were done out of spite. Near the body was a long dagger, the haft of which was covered with blood. A few strands of hair adhered to the sticky haft and were readily identified as the victim's."

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He reached down and drew from the brief-case he had brought with him a long, slim package. He carefully unfolded the waxed-paper wrapper and exposed to view a dagger in a metal sheath. It was about a foot and a half long. The haft, which was stained with dried blood, was about a third of the over-all length, about an inch wide and half an inch thick, with all the edges nicely rounded off. It appeared to be made of bone or ivory, and was engraved with swastikas.

"That was the weapon, I suppose," I said with a smile.

He grinned back at me. "Not much doubt about that," he said. "It fits the wounds just right."

"Any fingerprints?" I asked.

Delhanty shook his head. "None on the weapon, and only the ones you'd expect in the room."

I picked up the dagger gingerly by the sheath.

"Why, it's weighted in the haft," I said.

Delhanty nodded grimly. "It would have to be," he replied, "to have done the job it did on Bennett."

I put it down again. "Well, a dagger like that shouldn't be too hard to trace," I said hopefully.

Delhanty smiled. "We had no trouble with that. It belonged to Bennett."

"The chambermaid identified it?"

"Better than that. The mate to it was right there hanging on the wall. Here, let me show you." Once again he reached into his brief-case and this time came up with a large photograph showing one side of a room. There was a desk against the wall and a typewriter on a small table beside it. But it was the wall above the desk that attracted my attention, for arranged symmetrically on hooks was a veritable arsenal of weapons, each with a little card, presumably of explanation, tacked underneath. By actual count, there were two German sabres, three pistols, two weapons that looked like policemen's nightsticks (at my puzzled look, Delhanty murmured, "Taken from guards of a concentration camp — nasty weapons — almost as thick as my wrist") and one dagger, the twin of the weapon lying on my desk. But there was another card and an empty hook where the other dagger should have been, and it was just possible to discern its outline as a lighter area in the faded wallpaper.

Delhanty chuckled. "G.I. trophies. My boy brought home enough stuff to equip a German regiment."

He drew a pencil from his breast pocket and pointed with it to the desk in the photograph.

"Now I call your attention to this stuff on the desk to the right of this pile of books. It's hard to make out in the picture, but I itemized it."

He referred to his notes again. " 'Loose change to the sum of twenty-eight cents, a key to the room, a pen and pencil set, a jackknife, a clean handkerchief, and a billfold.' It's the usual stuff that a man keeps in his pockets and transfers every time he

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changes his suit. One thing struck me as funny: the billfold was empty. It had his license and registration and a receipted bill for his room rent and a little book of stamps, but I mean there wasn't a dollar in the money compartment."

"Nothing odd in that," I remarked. "Students are not noted for their wealth."

Delhanty shook his head stubbornly. "Usually you carry some money with you. The change on the desk didn't even amount to lunch money. We searched the place carefully and found no money and no bankbook. But in the wastebasket we did find this."

Once again he ducked down to rummage in his brief-case. This time he brought forth a long government-franked envelope.

"That's the kind they send checks in," he remarked. "And do you notice the postmark? He must have received it yesterday. So we checked with the local banks and the first one we tried admitted they had cashed a government check for Bennett for one hundred dollars. The teller couldn't be sure, of course, but unless Bennett asked for bills of a particular denomination, he would probably give him the money in three twenties, two tens, three fives and five ones.

"Well," Delhanty went on, "a young man in Bennett's circumstances wouldn't be likely to spend all that in a day. So that suggested to me that robbery might be the motive. And then I thought of the car parked outside with the ignition key still in the switch. It wasn't left there overnight because it would have been tagged. That meant that it was delivered there this morning, either by a friend who had borrowed it, or, more likely, by some garage. We had luck on that too. We found that the car had been left at the High Street Garage for lubrication and was delivered around 9:30 this morning. When I asked about the key in the switch, the manager of the garage was as puzzled as I had been. They always deliver the keys to the owner, he said, or make arrangements with him to leave them somewhere.

"I asked to look at their records to see who delivered the car. Well, it's only a small place and they didn't keep any such records, but the manager knew that it was a young apprentice mechanic they had there — fellow named Sterling, James Sterling. He does most of the lubricating work and delivers cars when necessary. The manager couldn't be sure, but he thought Sterling had delivered Bennett's car to him several times before. I considered that important because it would show that Sterling knew Bennett's room number and would be able to go right on up without making inquiries."

"I take it," I said, "that there wouldn't be any trouble getting into the hotel without being noticed."

"Oh, as to that, the place is wide open. It's not really a hotel, you see. There's no desk clerk. The outer door is kept open during the day, and any-

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one could come in and out a dozen times without being seen.

"I asked to speak to Sterling," Delhanty went on, "and learned that he had gone home sick. I got his address and was just leaving, when I noticed a row of steel lockers which I figured were used by the mechanics for their work clothes. I asked the manager to open Sterling's and, after a little fuss, he did. And what do you think I found there, tucked away behind the peak of his greasy work cap? Three twenties, two tens, and three fives. No ones — I suppose he figured he could have those on him without exciting suspicion."

"You went to his home?"

"That's right, sir. He may have been sick before, but he was a lot sicker when he saw me. At first he said he didn't know anything about the money. Then he said he won it shooting crap. And then he said he had found it in Bennett's car, tucked down between the seat and the back cushion. So I told him we had found his fingerprints on the billfold. We hadn't, of course, but sometimes a little lie like that is enough to break them. His answer to that was that he wanted a lawyer. So we locked him up. I thought I'd talk to you before we really put him through the wringer."

"You've done an excellent job, Delhanty," I said. "Quick work and good, straight thinking. I suppose Sterling thought that leaving the key in the switch would indicate that he hadn't seen Bennett to deliver it to him personally. And you went him one better and figured that his leaving the key in the switch was in itself an indication that something was wrong. Finding the money clinches it, of course. But it would be nice if we found someone who had seen him. You questioned the residents, of course?"

"Naturally, we questioned everybody at the hotel," Delhanty said. He chuckled. "And it just goes to show how sometimes too much investigating can hinder you by leading you off on a tangent. I questioned them before I got a line on Sterling, and for a while I thought I had the logical suspect right there in one of the residents of the hotel. You see we had gone through all the residents, and Houston, the manager, and had drawn a perfect blank: no one had seen anything; no one had heard anything. Then we called in the chambermaid. We had left her for the last because she had been kind of upset and hysterical, what with finding the body and all. Well, she *had* seen something.

"She had started to work on that floor at half-past eight. She's sure of the time because the chapel clock was just chiming. She was just going into the room at the other end of the corridor from Bennett's when she saw Alfred Starr, who occupies the room next to Bennett, leave his room and knock on Bennett's door. She watched, and saw him enter. She waited a minute or two and then went on with her work."

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"Why did she watch?" I asked.

"I asked the same question," said Delhanty, "and she said it was because Starr and Bennett had had a fearful row a couple of days before, and she wondered about his going in now. When I had questioned Starr earlier, he had said nothing about having gone into Bennett's room. So I called him in again and asked him about it. At first he denied it. That's normal. Then when he realized that someone had seen him, he admitted that he had visited Bennett that morning, but insisted that it was only to wish him luck on his exam. Then I mentioned the row he had had a couple of days before. He didn't try to dodge it. He admitted he had had a fight with Bennett, but he claimed he had been a little tight at the time. It appears he had brought his girl down from Boston for a dance at the Medical School a couple of weeks ago. He had been tied up in the morning and had asked Bennett to entertain her. Then he had found out that after she had gone back to Boston, Bennett had written her a couple of times. That was what the fight was about, but he had later realized that he had been foolish. Bennett's coming up for his exam gave him an opportunity to apologize and to wish him luck. He hadn't said anything about it because he didn't want to get mixed up in anything, especially now with final exams on."

Delhanty shrugged his shoulders. "For a while, I thought I had my whole case right there: jealousy over a girl as the motive; weapon and opportunity right at hand; and even some indication of guilt in his not telling a straight story from the beginning. And then the whole case collapsed. The time element was off. The Medical Examiner had figured the murder had taken place about nine o'clock. That didn't bother me too much since the best they can give you is only an approximate time. But Starr was on his way to play squash at the gym, and they have a time-clock arrangement there because there's a fee for the use of the squash courts. Well, according to that clock, Starr was ready to start playing at 8:33. That would give him only three minutes from the time he entered Bennett's room to the time when he started playing, and it just isn't enough. So there you are. If the time at both ends hadn't been so exact, we would have felt that Starr was the star suspect."

He laughed at his pun, and I managed a smile. Then a thought occurred to me.

"Look here," I said, "there's something wrong with the time even as it stands. I know the arrangement for the squash courts; I've played there often enough. The lockers are at the other end of the building from the courts. You change into your gym clothes first and then you go down to the squash courts and get stamped in. Starr would not have had a chance to change if those times are correct as given."

Delhanty was apologetic. "He

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didn't change in the gym. I should have mentioned that. The hotel is just across the street, you see. He was wearing shorts and a sweatshirt and had his racket with him when he went into Bennett's room. The chambermaid told us that."

I nodded, a little disappointed. Strictly speaking, criminal investigation is not my job. The police report to me because as County Attorney it is my function to indict, and if a true bill is found, to try the case in court. But it is only natural to seize the opportunity of showing the professional where he might have slipped up.

There was a discreet knock and my secretary opened the door just wide enough to put her head in and say, "Professor Welt is outside."

"Have him come in," I said.

Nicky entered and I introduced him to Delhanty.

"A sad business, Lieutenant," Nicky said, shaking his head. Then he noticed the dagger on the desk.

"This the weapon?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Bennett's, I suppose."

"That's right," said Delhanty, his tone showing surprise. "How did you know?"

"I'm only guessing, of course," Nicky replied, with an amused shrug of the shoulders. "But it's fairly obvious. A dagger like that isn't anything that a man would normally carry around with him. And if you went calling on someone with the intent of bludgeoning him to death, it is hardly the sort of thing you would select to take with you. There are a thousand things that are readily available and are so much better for the purpose — a wrench, a hammer, a piece of pipe. But, of course, if you had no intention of killing when you set out, and then found it necessary or expedient, and this was the only thing to hand —"

"But it wasn't," I said. "Show him the photograph, Lieutenant."

Delhanty handed over the photograph with some reluctance, I thought. I got the impression that he was not too pleased with Nicky's characteristic air of amused condescension.

Nicky studied the photograph intently. "These books on the desk here," he said, pointing with a lean forefinger, "are probably the texts he was planning to take to the examination with him. Notice that they all have paper markers. I don't see any notes. Did you find a package of notes anywhere in the room, Lieutenant?"

"Notes?" Delhanty shook his head. "No notes."

"Notes and texts at an examination, Nicky?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, in accordance with the New Plan, you remember, the candidate outlines his dissertation in the last half-hour, indicating what he hopes to prove, listing a partial bibliography and so forth. He is permitted to make use of any texts and notes that he cares to bring with him for that part of the examination."

"Is that so?" said Delhanty po-

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litely. "History student, was he? I noticed the top book was History of Cal — Cali — something."

"No, he was an English Literature student, Lieutenant," I said. "But that involves the study of a lot of history. The two fields are interrelated." I remembered that there had been a brief vogue of Moslem influence among Eighteenth Century writers. "Was it *History of the Caliphate?*" I suggested.

He sampled the title, and then shook his head doubtfully.

I shrugged my shoulders and turned again to Nicky. "Well, why didn't Bennett's assailant select one of the bludgeons instead of the dagger?" I asked. "Excellent weapons for the purpose according to the Lieutenant here — each as thick as his wrist."

"But he didn't use the dagger — at least not to kill with," Nicky replied.

We both stared at him.

"But there is blood on the haft, and some of Bennett's hair. And the Medical Examiner found that it fitted the wounds just right."

Nicky smiled, a peculiarly knowing and annoying smile. "Yes, it would fit, but it is not the weapon." He spread his hands. "Consider, here is a large variety of weapons ready to hand. Would a man select a dagger to bludgeon with when there are actually two bludgeons handy? Besides, hanging there on the wall, how would he know that the haft of the dagger was weighted and could be used as a bludgeon at all?"

"Suppose he planned to stab him, but that Bennett turned before he could draw the blade from the sheath, or say it stuck," Delhanty suggested.

"Then there would be fingerprints showing," Nicky retorted.

"He might have worn gloves," I offered.

"In this weather?" Nicky scoffed. "And attracted no notice? Or are you suggesting that Bennett obligingly waited while the assassin drew them on?"

"He could have wiped the prints off," said Delhanty coldly.

"Off the sheath, yes, but not off the haft. When you draw a dagger, you grip the haft in one hand and the sheath in the other. Now if your victim turns at just that moment and you have to club him with the weighted haft, his prints will be nicely etched in the resultant blood. And you couldn't wipe those off unless you also wiped off the blood or smeared it. That would mean that the murderer would have to have worn at least one glove, and that would be even more noticeable than a pair."

A faint, elusive thought flickered across my mind that was connected somehow with a man wearing a single glove, but Delhanty was speaking and it escaped me.

"I'll admit, Professor," he was saying, "that I'd expect he would have taken one of the bludgeons — but the fact is, he didn't. We know he used the dagger because it was right there. And it was covered with blood which matches Bennett's and with hair that

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matches his, and most of all, it fits the wounds."

"Of course," Nicky retorted scornfully. "That's why it was used. It had to fit the wounds in order to conceal the real weapon. The bludgeons wouldn't do because they were too thick. Suppose you had just crushed somebody's skull with a weapon that you felt left a mark which could be traced to you. What would you do? You could continue bashing your victim until you reduced his head to a pulp — in the hope of obliterating the marks; but that would be an extremely bloody business and would take some time. If there were something lying around that would fit the wound nicely, however, you could use it once or twice to get blood and hair on it, and then leave it for the police to find. Having a weapon at hand which apparently fits, they would not think to look for another."

"But there was nothing distinctive about the mark of the weapon," Delhanty objected.

"If you are thinking of something like a branding iron, of course not. But if we assume that the dagger haft was selected because it fitted the original wound, it automatically gives us the shape of the real weapon. Since it was the edge of the haft that was used, I should surmise that the real weapon was smooth and rounded, or round, and about half an inch in diameter. It would have to be something that the attacker could have with him without exciting comment."

"A squash racket!" I cried.

Nicky turned sharply. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

I told him about Starr. "He was dressed in his gym clothes and he had his squash racket with him. The frame of a squash racket would about fit those dimensions. And it would excite no comment from Bennett since Starr was in shorts and sweatshirt."

Nicky pursed his lips and considered. "Is there any reason for supposing that the mark of a squash racket would implicate him?" he asked.

"He was seen by the chambermaid to go into the room."

"That's true enough," Nicky conceded, "although I gathered from your story that he did not know he had been seen."

Before I could answer, Delhanty spoke up. "Of course," he said sarcastically, "I'm nothing but a cop, and all these theories are a little over my head. But I've made an arrest and it was done through ordinary police work on the basis of evidence. Maybe I shouldn't have wasted my time, and my men's time, with legwork and just sat back and dreamed the answer. But there's pretty good proof that Bennett was robbed of a hundred dollars this morning, and I've got a man in a cell right now who had that hundred dollars on him and who hasn't been able to give any explanation that would satisfy a child as to how it got there." He sat back with an air of having put Nicky and me too, I suspect, in our places.

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"Indeed! And how did you go about finding this individual?"

Delhanty shrugged his shoulders in a superior sort of way and did not answer. So I explained about the envelope and billfold clues, and how they had been tracked down.

Nicky listened attentively and then said quietly, "The mechanic arrived around 9:30. Have you considered the possibility, Lieutenant, that Bennett was already dead at the time, and that Sterling's crime was not of having killed, but only of having robbed? Much more likely, I assure you. The man would be an idiot to kill, especially for so small a sum, when he knows that he would be suspected almost immediately — after all, his employer knew where he was going and the approximate time that he would arrive. But if he found the man already dead and he saw the money in the wallet, it would be fairly safe to take it. Even if the police were to discover that a sum of money was missing, which was unlikely in the first place, they would normally assume that it had been taken by the murderer. So he probably took the money and then went back to the shop prepared to say, if he should be asked, that he had knocked on Bennett's door to deliver the keys and Bennett had not answered."

"That sounds reasonable, Nicky," I said. Then noticing the look on Delhanty's face, I quickly added, "But it's only a theory. And we know that criminals are guilty of idiotic acts as well as criminal ones. Now if we knew exactly when Bennett was killed, we'd know whether Sterling could be completely eliminated, or if he was still a suspect."

"You could always get the Medical Examiner to swear that it couldn't have happened after nine," Delhanty murmured sarcastically.

I ignored the remark. Besides, it occurred to me that we had overlooked a possible bit of evidence.

"Look, Nicky," I said, "do you remember Emmett Hawthorne saying that he called on Bennett on his way down to the exam? Bennett must already have been dead, which is why he didn't answer and why Emmett concluded that he had gone on ahead. Maybe Emmett remembers what time it was. If it was before 9:30, it would at least clear Sterling."

Nicky gave me a nod of approval, and I felt inordinately pleased with myself. It happened so seldom.

I reached for the telephone. "Do you know where he's staying, Nicky? I'll ring him."

"He's staying at the Ambassador," Nicky answered, "but I doubt if he's there now. He was in his cubicle in the library stacks when I left, and there's no phone connection except at the center desk of the Reading Room. If you had a messenger, you might send him over and ask him to come here. I don't think he'd mind. I'm sure he'd be interested in our discussion."

"Sergeant Carter is outside chinning with your secretary," said Del-

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hanty grudgingly. "I could have him go. Where is it?"

"It's a regular rabbit warren of a place," I said. I looked at Nicky. "Perhaps you could go out and give him directions —"

"Perhaps I'd better," said Nicky, and crossed the room to the door.

I smiled inwardly while we waited for him to return. I did not see how Starr's alibi could be broken, but I was sure that Nicky did. When he returned a minute or two later, however, his first words were discouraging.

"Your idea of Starr and the squash racket," he said, "is not entirely devoid of ingenuity, but it won't do. Consider: the original quarrel was about a girl and it occurred a couple of days ago. Now if the two young men are living in the same house — on the same floor, in fact — and Bennett was probably around most of the time, since he was preparing for his exam, why didn't Starr seek him out earlier? It is most unlikely that he would have brooded over the matter for two whole days, and then bright and early on the morning of the third day, on his way to play squash, have stopped off and killed him. Absurd! It would not be beyond the bounds of possibility if Starr had dropped in to warn him off or to threaten him, and then in the course of the quarrel that might have followed, killed him. But in that event there would have been voices raised in anger, and the noise would have been heard by the chambermaid who was listening for it. There would have been some sign of a struggle — and there was none."

He shook his head. "No, no, I'm afraid you don't grasp the full significance of the dagger and the necessity for its use."

"Look at it this way," he continued; "suppose the attacker had not used the dagger as a red herring. Suppose that after having bludgeoned Bennett with the weapon he had brought with him, he had departed. What line of investigation would the police have pursued then? On the basis of the wound, the Medical Examiner would describe the weapon as a blunt instrument, round or rounded, and about half an inch in diameter. A length of narrow pipe, or a heavy steel rod would fit, but the assailant couldn't walk around or come into Bennett's room carrying something like that without exciting comment and suspicion. Of course, he could carry it concealed — up his coat sleeve, perhaps. It would be awkward, but it could be managed. And it would be still more awkward to draw out without Bennett seeing and making an outcry. But again, with luck it could be managed. All this if the attacker set out with the deliberate idea of murdering. But sooner or later, the police would consider the possibility of the crime having been committed on the spur of the moment. And then it would occur to them that the weapon would have to be something that the attacker had with him, something he could carry openly without exciting the slightest

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suspicion. And that could only be —"

"*A cane!*" I exclaimed.

"Precisely," said Nicky. "And when you think of a cane, Professor Hawthorne is the first person who comes to mind."

"Are you serious, Nicky?"

"Why not? It's an important part of the rather theatrical costume he designed to go with the new personality he acquired since becoming a great man. You can readily see that in his mind, at least, the mark of his cane would identify him as surely as if he had branded the young man with his initials."

"But why would he want to kill his protégé?"

"Because he wasn't — wasn't his protégé, I mean. You remember the young man was scheduled to come up for examination at the beginning of the semester and did not. Hawthorne told us that it was because our library had acquired the original Byington Papers and that Bennett wanted a chance to study them. But The Byington Papers had been published in full, and it is only a short summary of this dissertation that the candidate expounds at the exam. So that even if the original manuscript were to furnish additional proof of his thesis, it would not justify postponing the exam. Hence, we must conclude that Bennett had got an idea for an entirely new dissertation. Naturally, he told Hawthorne about it. But Hawthorne had to go down to Texas, so he probably got Bennett to say nothing of his discovery until his return. Then when announcement was made of the new edition of Hawthorne's book, Bennett decided to stand for examination again. Hawthorne came back as soon as he found out. He arrived last night and this morning was his first chance to see Bennett. I am quite sure he did not come intending to kill him. He would have brought another weapon if he had. He came to beg him to hold off again until they could work out something together — a paper on which they would collaborate, perhaps. I don't think it occurred to Hawthorne that Bennett might refuse. But he did, probably because he felt that after the announcement of a new edition of The Byington Papers he could no longer trust Hawthorne.

"To Hawthorne, this refusal meant the loss of everything he held dear — his academic standing, his reputation as a scholar, his position in the university. So he raised his cane and struck."

"But what discovery could Bennett have made that would justify Hawthorne's killing him?" I asked.

Nicky's eyebrows rose. "I should think you could guess that. We know that Bennett's dissertation subject had something to do with the original manuscript. My guess would be that the book that you noticed on his desk, Lieutenant, was a History of Calligraphy — two 'l's,' Lieutenant — a history of handwriting." (The look of sudden recognition that lit up Delhanty's face confirmed the guess.) "I fancy the other books were

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probably concerned with paper and the chemistry of ink — that sort of thing. In any case, I am quite certain that Bennett had discovered some proof — scientific proof, not internal criticism like Korngold's which is always subject to different interpretations — but proof of handwriting styles and ink and paper that The Byington Papers were a forgery."

The telephone exploded into sound and when I lifted the instrument to my ear, I heard the excited, panicky voice of Sergeant Carter.

"He just shot himself," he cried. "Professor Hawthorne just shot himself here at the hotel!"

I glanced at the two men in the room and saw that they had heard. Delhanty had risen and was reaching for his hat.

"Stay there," I said into the phone. "Lieutenant Delhanty will be there in a minute. What happened?"

"I don't know," Carter answered. "I went to the library but he had just gone. I caught him at the hotel here and I gave him Professor Welt's message. He just nodded and went into the next room, and a couple of seconds later there was a shot."

"All right, stand by." I cradled the phone.

Delhanty was already at the door. "That's it," I said to him.

"Guess so," he muttered, and closed the door behind him.

I turned to Nicky. "What message did you ask Carter to give him?"

He smiled. "Oh, that? I merely suggested to the Sergeant that he ask Hawthorne to bring Bennett's notes with him."

I nodded moodily. For a minute or two I was silent, staring at the desk in front of me. Then I looked up.

"Look here, Nicky, did you expect that your request would have the effect it did?"

He pursed his lips as if to take thought. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "I did not consider it beyond the bounds of possibility. However, my primary concern was my responsibility to poor Bennett. I thought that if there was any merit in his idea, I ought to expand his notes into a paper which I would publish in his name." His little blue eyes glittered and his lips relaxed in a frosty smile. "Naturally, I wanted to begin as soon as possible."

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THE PLUPERFECT MURDER

by ROY VICKERS

THE "Holborn murder," as it was called at the time, deserves its place in the list of perfect crimes. True that Harold Taylor took an insane risk. But he took it with his eyes open, knowing it was a risk — and the risk came off. He made no mistake, tripped himself on no tremendous trifle. It would have been utterly impossible for the most brilliant detective, the most thorough police organization, to catch him.

He was hanged, in the end, through the agency of a charwoman, who, being unable to read the newspapers, had never even heard of him — never knew the grim consequences of her action. She wanted a reward, of approximately eight shillings and sixpence, for finding a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez that had nothing whatever to do with the crime.

Harold Taylor was the son of a schoolteacher in the village of Maenwy in Carnarvonshire. In January 1908, when he was twenty-two, his father died. After all expenses had been paid and the furniture sold Harold found himself possessed of a sum of £85. On the strength of this he threw up his clerkship in a local estate-office and went to London to seek fame and fortune as an author. By May of that year his capital had shrunk to £10 while his prospects remained less than nothing.

It was the year of the opening of the White City, at Shepherds Bush, with the Franco-British Exhibition. The area of the exhibition was so extensive that many persons who were in no sense invalids were glad to hire wheeled chairs in order to see it all without undue fatigue. Taylor, a well set-up young man, quite passably good-looking, was glad to sink his pride and become a chair-man at a wage of £1 per week, plus tips.

One Saturday afternoon a patron in the form of an elderly, richly dressed, and rather obvious maiden lady stepped into Taylor's chair.

She was Florence Absolom, aged fifty-four, the blamelessly respectable daughter of a deceased Wesleyan minister through whom indirectly she had inherited some £43,000 in gilt-edged securities. Miss Absolom lived by herself in a small flat in Red Lion Square, off Holborn.

It seems that Miss Absolom alone of all with whom he came in contact saw in Taylor a man who was too good for his surroundings. "A gentleman," as she no doubt would have expressed it. For this reason, perhaps, she gave him no tip but invited him to tea at her flat for the following afternoon.

The conversation turned largely on the subject of speed. Miss Absolom expressed her nervousness of taxicabs, then a comparative novelty. Gradu-

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ally she worked round to the suggestion that Taylor should hire a car and take her for a ride — at her expense, of course. He agreed. The fact that he had never driven a car was nothing. He had a friend, a lorry man employed at the White City, who would teach him in the earlier part of the mornings of the coming week and he would take Miss Absolom out next Sunday.

As he took his leave she pressed a £5 note into his hand for "expenses." He repeated his assurance that there would be no expenses and, somewhat stiffly, placed the £5 note on her mantlepiece and departed.

This refusal of the £5 note should be attributed less to his delicacy than to his intelligence. Taylor, even at this early stage, had scented the possibility of big game.

Exactly what was the relation between these two during the months that followed it is difficult to guess. If Miss Absolom was in love with the young scoundrel the love was probably unconscious. It is more credible that he made a strong appeal to her thwarted instinct of motherhood. He himself undoubtedly took this view, for he was able to tell her of his flirtation with a young woman without anticipating jealousy on her part.

During that summer of 1908 they were constantly together. Now and again Miss Absolom would come to the White City and hire his chair. This happened often enough to become the subject of coarse jests among his fellow employees.

During June, July, and part of August, Taylor steadfastly refused to derive the smallest pecuniary benefit from his association with Miss Absolom. She bought the car which they had previously hired. He did everything he could to keep down the running costs, cleaning the car himself and garaging it at a low rent in the Mews over which he lodged in the Grays Inn Road. When they stopped for meals he insisted on paying for both out of his own pocket.

In the third week in August he lost his job through being absent without leave for the purpose of driving Miss Absolom to Reading and back. Thereupon, Miss Absolom firmly demanded the right to assist him in his career. It was absurd, she pointed out, for him to be so squeamish in money matters when every penny of hers would one day be his.

Taylor's manly pride went down before this remorseless logic.

Miss Absolom, in fact, had her plans all cut-and-dried.

"There is nothing," she told him, "that you cannot do — with money behind you." From letters written to a friend it is pathetically clear that at this stage she intended that he should later on adopt a Parliamentary career. In the meantime, as he was now only twenty-two, it would do no harm to enter some profession — for example, the law.

This conversation took place over lunch at her flat. In the afternoon she took him to a ready-made tailor and bought him a dress suit. There are

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details of masculine attire inseparable from the wearing of a dress suit. She brushed aside his offer to order these himself and have the bill sent to her. She superintended the purchase of each trifle, paying in gold from her chain purse.

That evening she took him to dinner at the Charing Cross Railway Hotel. Afterwards they went to a leading music hall, but did not stay until the end. Oddly enough, this program was repeated every Monday and Friday evening until the following March. In each case they dined at the Railway Hotel and in each case they went to a music hall, staying only for half an hour or so. The attraction to Miss Absolom, one must assume, was not the show, but the fact of being seen in public with the young man.

That first evening was in the nature of a celebration. On the following day Taylor was taken by Miss Absolom to her solicitor, a Mr. Hellier, who had ground-floor offices in Great James Street, that rather shabby extension of Bedford Row which is the solicitor's Harley Street. Great James Street, it should be noted, is within one minute's walk of Red Lion Square.

Taylor, it had been previously arranged, was to be articled to Mr. Hellier who, as he had recently drawn up Miss Absolom's will in Taylor's favor, was fully alive to the general situation.

Next came a visit, under Miss Absolom's tutelage, to a landlady in Doughty Street, in whose house Taylor was to occupy two furnished rooms. To round off this day of preparations for the new life, she took him to her doctor, who was also an oculist. The doctor found the young man sound in wind and limb, but suffering from a slight astigmatism. He wrote out a prescription for glasses that need be worn only when reading, or driving a car.

There was still an hour to spare before the shops closed, so Miss Absolom took the prescription, together with her protégé, to an optician in Holborn.

Here there was a slight difference of opinion. Taylor wanted spectacles, but Miss Absolom decided that spectacles were unsightly. At first gently, and then firmly, she pressed the case for pince-nez. Pince-nez it was — and for pince-nez the optician took measurements. She ordered two pairs, rather elaborate gold-rimmed affairs, at a cost of £4-10-0 each. They were delivered a week later at the rooms in Doughty Street.

According to Taylor's signed statement, the greater part of which was undoubtedly true, he did not contemplate murdering Miss Absolom until some half an hour before he actually did so. Nevertheless, within a week of his coming to the solicitor's office, he was holding a very peculiar conversation with his employer.

"Miss Absolom's great kindness to me puts me in an awkward position," he asserted, and went on: "Suppose she were to die suddenly with her will in my favor! People would say that I had exerted undue influence."

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"You need not worry about that. There could be no question of undue influence in this case," replied the solicitor — and afterwards regretted his words. In cross-examination later on he said that the question had startled him; otherwise, he would not have answered.

This conversation is the only item of evidence that Taylor planned the murder a long time beforehand.

Between September and Christmas Miss Absolom consulted Mr. Hellier three times, not as a legal adviser, but as a man of the world. Taylor, it seemed, was not as happy and contented as she had hoped. Mr. Hellier, at each sitting, advised her to give him a little more liberty, but later events proved that she did not take his advice.

Taylor, in fact, was learning something of the troubles of the bird in the gilded cage. More exactly, Miss Absolom treated him almost as if he were a young boy. He lunched every day at her flat, dining at his rooms and returning to the flat nearly every evening from nine until ten when, with a good-night kiss on the cheek, he was packed off to bed. Every material want of his was promptly gratified by Miss Absolom, but invariably Miss Absolom herself made the actual purchases and as invariably compelled him to accompany her to the shop. She allowed him fifteen shillings a week for pocket money and made him account for it — not from motives of parsimony, but in order to keep a motherly eye on him. She insisted on discussing with his landlady the most minute details of his personal health and comfort. To the one servant at her flat she would refer to him not as "Mr. Taylor," but as "Master Harold."

At Christmas she obtained three days' extra leave for him and took him for a week's holiday to a hotel at Torquay where she spoke of him as her nephew and insisted on his sleeping in the dining room of her suite.

On the night of Boxing Day he had a headache and went to bed soon after dinner. She came to his room to give him aspirin and then, with no more than a mild protest from him, went through his pockets.

In one of them she found an affectionate letter from a young woman, then a Miss Sadler, employed by a drapery firm in Oxford street.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked and before he could answer: "I am surprised and hurt at your having a flirtation with a girl of that class. This is to go no further."

"Oh, all right!" he grunted sleepily.

She seems to have accepted this as a solemn pledge. As far as can be ascertained she did not again refer to the girl until the following March, the day of her death.

It was the 22nd of March, 1909, and a Thursday. Every Thursday, lunch in the flat was served at a quarter to one instead of one o'clock, in order that Miss Absolom's servant might have more time on this, her free afternoon. She was allowed to serve the lunch and go.

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Now on the previous night Taylor had been to the Oxford Music Hall with Miss Sadler and this fact had somehow come to Miss Absolom's knowledge.

We do not know how the conversation started. Taylor's signed statement begins, as it were, at the end, with the facts accepted by both sides.

("Miss Absolom did not say anything at first, but she was angry. Then she said: 'You're much too young to think like that about women and when the time comes for you to marry you must marry a lady.' And I said: 'Rose is quite lady enough for me or anybody else.' And then Miss Absolom said I must give up Rose and as she had been paying for me all this time I said I would. Then Miss Absolom was quiet and before I went back to the office she kissed me like she often did and said I was a good boy, which was only her way of speaking, and that she wanted to see Mr. Hellier but not about me and Rose, but about something quite different which she did not mention to me.")

The latter part of that last rambling sentence does not ring true. Why this labored explanation that though she wished to consult her solicitor it was "not about me and Rose." It is fairly safe to assume that Miss Absolom wished to discuss precisely that matter and that she told Taylor as much.

On his way back to the office we may guess that Taylor was contemplating the fact that the material benefits he had so far received were an inadequate return for all that he had endured at the hands of Miss Absolom. There was the question of the future to be considered — with special reference to the coming interview between Miss Absolom and her solicitor.

Mr. Hellier's offices were on the ground floor of a house that had once been a dwelling house. On your left, as you entered the open front door, was a small room, the window of which opened over a basement. Behind this was Mr. Hellier's room. On your right was the waiting room and behind that was the clerks' room.

Taylor had the little room all to himself. His early struggles as an author had at least made him a fairly good typist, so that a good deal of copying work fell to him.

At twenty minutes past two Mr. Hellier came back from lunch with a client named Dacosta. Mr. Hellier looked into the waiting room and asked Taylor whether he had finished the Dacosta agreement.

Taylor had completed the work before leaving for lunch. It was lying on the table beside his typewriter. Here he took his first risk — albeit a very small one: that Mr. Hellier would not notice the agreement.

"No, sir," he answered. "I am sorry but I haven't started on it."

Mr. Hellier expressed his annoyance and then inquired how long the work would take.

"I will bring it into your room at a quarter to three, sir, if I am not interrupted in the meantime," answered Taylor.

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"Who is going to interrupt you?" grunted Mr. Hellier.

One imagines a "deprecatory smile" on the face of the young clerk as he answered: "As it's so important, sir, I'll make sure, if you don't mind, by locking the door."

Taylor locked the door and waited until his employer was in his own room with Mr. Dacosta. Then he put on his bowler hat, his overcoat, and his gloves. Next, he opened the window and dropped six feet into the basement.

Within a minute he was at the corner of Red Lion Street, and some one hundred yards from the Square. He went into a public house which displayed a telephone sign. Here he gave the number of the block of flats and in due course this call was answered by the porter. Altering his voice just enough to make it unrecognizable, he told the porter that he wanted to speak to Mrs. Eagle on an urgent matter. He gave a mumbled name and urged the porter to hurry.

Now Mrs. Eagle was tenant of a flat on the fifth floor. Miss Absolom's flat was on the second floor. Further, there were only two telephones in the building at that time — Miss Absolom's and the one in the porter's office.

As soon as the porter laid down the receiver, Taylor cut off. He hurried to the block of flats, reaching Miss Absolom's door, of which he had a latch-key, just as the porter, an elderly, corpulent fellow, arrived on the fifth floor.

He knew that she was resting in her bedroom. Without disturbing her he went to the kitchen whence, after some consideration, he emerged with a flatiron and a blind-cord.

The details become gruesome. It will be sufficient to record that at a quarter past eleven that night Miss Absolom's maid, entering the bedroom with hot cocoa, found her mistress battered to death.

To leave a gap of five minutes or so we again find Taylor at the telephone — this time in the hall of Miss Absolom's flat. He is handling the instrument somewhat awkwardly because he has his gloves on. In a pocket case are five gemmed rings, subsequently valued at £70, just torn from the dead fingers of Miss Absolom.

He again rang the porter and apologized for the stupidity of the exchange in cutting him off before he could speak to Mrs. Eagle. There was no need, he protested in his slightly altered voice, to trouble her a second time if the porter would be good enough to tell her that her cousin was in London and would like to meet her at her club at four o'clock.

Taylor listened for the porter's footsteps and then, leaving Miss Absolom's flat by the front door, took his big risk. He had disposed of the porter who was at that moment on the floor above, making his second journey to Mrs. Eagle's flat. But he could not similarly dispose of the other tenants, most of whom knew him by sight. If one of them were to see him leaving the block, detection would be certain.

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The risk came off. No one who knew him saw him leave the block — no passerby in the Square noticed him. Before Mrs. Eagle had finished explaining to the porter that she possessed neither a cousin nor a club Taylor was back in his little room in Mr. Hellier's office with the better part of ten minutes to spare.

He unlocked the door and waited. Then he took the typed agreement to Mr. Hellier, at the same time asking and obtaining permission to leave the office an hour early.

Shortly after five o'clock he was in the Burlington Arcade, the tip of a leather pocket case protruding from his coat pocket. He took a couple of turns, shop-gazing in the manner of a country cousin. Then he made the inevitable discovery that the protruding leather case had caught the attention of a pickpocket and had duly disappeared.

There was now nothing more to be done. He spent a pleasant evening in the company of Miss Sadler. We may assume that he slept well and that he even looked forward to the morning's papers with a certain confidence.

But when the time came for him to read them, he discovered that he had lost one of his two pairs of gold-rimmed pince-nez. In the light of after events we may safely say that this discovery shattered his complacency and filled him with something approaching panic.

A pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez, however, was not among the clues to the crime. There was, indeed, a singular lack of clues. That the porter had been decoyed from his point of observation was less a clue than a mere fact. The theft of the rings obviously was either the motive for the crime or a "blind."

As to the "blind" theory, there was only one person known to have a motive for killing Miss Absolom and that was her heir and protégé, Harold Taylor. But medical evidence supported the common-sense view that the crime was committed in the time between the two telephone messages received by the porter — that is between 2:25 and 2:35. During that period, as Mr. Hellier testified, Taylor was in his little room copying an agreement on his typewriter.

When they interviewed him, the police found Taylor calm and even helpful. He was able to give a minute description of the missing rings and to help his words with rough but serviceable drawings. This information was sent out and on March 26th, four days after the murder, a pawnbroker of Marylebone Road, accompanied by an assistant, called at Scotland Yard and produced the five rings.

They had been pawned just before closing time on March 22nd, the day of the murder, by a man and a woman together, both probably under thirty years of age.

Sergeant Wilmott (who later gained a V. C. in the great war) then carefully contrived a meeting between the pawnbroker and his assistant on the one hand, and Taylor and Miss Sadler on the other. Both men were in-

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stantly positive that they had never seen either the man or the woman before.

In the eyes of the police this definitely removed suspicion from Taylor. Armed only with the pawnbroker's rather hazy description, they began to look for the thieves, one of whom was almost certainly the murderer. They never found them — possibly because they were not looking for pickpockets.

In short, the crime, as a crime, was perfect. Nothing could now betray Taylor but blind chance. And the blind chance happened.

Taylor's prolonged search for his missing pince-nez yielded nothing. He seems to have dismissed the matter, to have put every detail of his successful crime out of his mind. The picture of him during the next few weeks is of a young man in a hurry.

After a day or two of decorous mourning for his benefactress he resigned his position and borrowed £100 from Mr. Hellier on account of the £43,000 which, minus death duties, would be his as soon as the tedious formality of probate was complete.

He had in the meantime persuaded Miss Sadler to leave her employment without notice, in order to devote her whole time to preparations for their wedding.

The preparations were no doubt as thorough as could be desired, but Taylor seems to have been unable to spare time for the ceremony itself. The young couple set up housekeeping together in a maisonette in Addison Road. Assisted by Mr. Hellier, Taylor borrowed again on his prospects — the amount of the loan this time being £7000.

The murder of Miss Absolom became one of London's unsolved mysteries.

The first link in the chain of blind chance that dragged Taylor to the gallows was the failure of a well-known architect, who occupied rooms on the first floor of the house in Great James Street, which had once been the scene of Taylor's labors. Mr. Hellier seized his opportunity of acquiring a much better suite and proceeded to transfer himself upstairs. Naturally he wished to leave his old office properly clean and for this purpose he employed for a week an extra charwoman. By a supreme flourish on the part of the goddess of chance this extra charwoman happened to be a Mrs. Taylor.

Mrs. Taylor's first task was to clean the basement which Mr. Hellier had used for the storage of office lumber. In the basement well, partly concealed by a piece of guttering, Mrs. Taylor found a small case containing a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez.

Mrs. Taylor took them to Mr. Hellier who looked at them and said he thought they must belong to his late clerk, Mr. Harold Taylor, who would doubtless reward her if she were to take them to his address, which Mr. Hellier would write down for her.

On the following morning Mrs. Taylor again stopped Mr. Hellier on his way out to lunch. She had seen

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Mr. Harold Taylor who had said that the glasses were not his. So, far from obtaining any reward, Mrs. Taylor had not even received her bus fare.

The woman, thought Mr. Hellier, was becoming a nuisance in her anxiety to be rewarded for her find.

"I can only suggest that you should take them to the lost property office at Scotland Yard. If the owner is found you will receive a part of their value as reward," said Mr. Hellier and hurried on his way to lunch.

Mrs. Taylor took his advice during her own dinner hour. Doubtless in the belief that Scotland Yard might at least do something about the wasted bus fare, she gave the clerk the whole story of her pilgrimage to Addison Road.

For no other reason than that her name was Taylor she was sent first to Tarrant of the Department of Dead Ends. He was disappointed when he learned that she had come in order to talk about a pair of pince-nez that did not belong to Harold Taylor. But he hung on from force of habit.

He opened the case, read the name of the Holborn opticians who had made it, and sent the pince-nez by messenger to the firm with a request for information.

The answer he received was that the glasses had been made for a Mr. Harold Taylor, that they had been ordered in duplicate and the frame fitted on August 25th, paid for in cash by an elderly lady, and delivered to Mr. Taylor in Doughty Street on September 2nd, 1908.

Now it must not be imagined that Superintendent Tarrant thereupon slapped his thigh and "in a flash saw the whole dastardly crime down to its smallest detail." He had probably done all that within a second or two of first going through the premises in Great James Street. Flashes have their uses, but they cannot be reproduced in court for the enlightenment of a jury. The difficulty is always proof. And no one knew better than Tarrant that the glasses by themselves would prove nothing.

He sent Sergeant Wilmott to Addison Road, convinced that he was wasting his time, to ask Harold Taylor if the glasses were his.

"No, they are not mine," said Taylor. "They look to me very like the ones an old woman brought here yesterday. Nothing to do with me. I can buy myself a pair if I want them."

"Are you sure? Why not try them on and see if they fit you?"

"Of course I'm sure!" replied Taylor with an emphasis that struck the sergeant as superfluous. "If they were mine, why on earth shouldn't I say so and have done with all this hanky-panky?"

That question remains unanswerable to this day. Why did Taylor deny ownership of the glasses? Even if they had been found on Miss Absolom's dead body they would not have endangered him, as he was known to be almost an inmate of the flat. In the circumstances it was impossible that the glasses could ever have proved anything against him.

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Sergeant Wilmott apologized for the trouble he had given and departed — for the firm of opticians, to ask if they could give incontrovertible proof of the ownership of the glasses.

They replied that while it was very improbable that they should have made glasses of exactly the same prescription, in a frame of exactly the same measurements, for someone else, they could only be certain if they were to look through their files — which would take about a week.

That week was one of strange activity for Harold Taylor. First, again with the help of Mr. Hellier, he married Miss Sadler by special license, there being certain reasons of a domestic nature which removed most of the normal obstacles to this form of marriage. Then he applied for a passport for himself and his wife for Brazil.

Next, he went to the store where he had bought (and paid for) his furniture and now resold it at a fraction of its cost. The furniture was to be moved and the cash paid at once — a queer transaction in view of the fact that he had nearly £2500 in his current account.

He had still five days to wait before he could sail. As his furniture had been removed, he was forced to take his wife to a hotel. Of all the hotels in London he chose the Charing Cross Railway Hotel — where he used to dine with Miss Absolom.

On Tuesday, April 23rd, the day before he was to sail, he transferred £4000 to Messrs. Cook, the well-known tourist agents, and drew £320 in cash for immediate use. As he came out of Cook's office in Ludgate Circus he was met by Sergeant Wilmott, who had been instructed to find out why Taylor had given Miss Sadler's age as twenty-two when it was really nineteen, and why he had stated that her parents were dead when in fact they were both alive.

Sergeant Wilmott explained the nature of his errand as tactfully as possible and requested Taylor to accompany him to the Yard.

There followed one of those fragments of dialogue that always look so disconnected and unnatural when they are reported in the newspapers.

Taylor said: "You don't expect me to swallow that. I only told them the tale to save a lot of fuss, and you know it isn't that as well as I do."

To which Wilmott replied: "Well, I expect that's a matter of opinion!"

This startling epigram seems to have infuriated Taylor, for we are assured that he then shouted:

"You won't get anything out of me unless I know where those glasses came from!"

"From the basement area in Great James Street, if you really want to know."

"Ah! That's the game, is it? Well, you won't get promotion out of this, because I'm going to spoil the game. I've had enough of your games. You can tell the bobby over there that it's all right. I did the old girl in."

That afternoon, he signed his confession.

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A-HUNTING WE WILL GO . . .

Are you one of those fortunate people who get an enormous kick out of browsing in second-hand bookstores? — and the mustier, the dustier, the better? If you are not, you are missing one of the really great pleasures of living. There are few thrills in life comparable to that of finding a long-sought bibliophilic treasure, nestling unwept, unhonored, and unsung in some cobwebbed, sleepy corner of an old bookshop, or in some dark, dank cubbyhole of ancient volumes that have not felt the caress of sunlight since the original owner, perhaps generations before, stacked the books helterskelter in that forgotten nook . . . We shall never forget the day, early in our collecting career, when we pounced on a copy of Conan Doyle's MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, *the New York Harper edition of 1894, turned breathlessly to the contents page, and found listed there the story titled "The Card-Board Box" — and realized that we had in our hands a copy of the suppressed first edition, a rarity that has been quoted to us as recently as December 1948 for no less a sum than $87.50 — and here was this copy clearly marked by a dealer who obviously did not know the fine points of Sherlock Holmes first editions at the unbelievable price of 50 cents! Needless to say, we handed over four bits in coin of the realm, and dashed out of that store with the book clutched fervently and with the deeply satisfying knowledge that for once we were offsetting an occasion when we had paid through the nose for an overpriced book that we had been unable to resist . . .*

The next time you go a-browsing, look on the shelf marked D (if the dealer is systematic enough to arrange his stock alphabetically), and try to pick up a book by Karl W. Detzer called TRUE TALES OF THE D.C.I. — *a book that used to be fairly common but now has gone the way of most books over twenty-five years old. This volume of short stories will repay your searching and reading: it concerns that special branch of the A.E.F. which undertook to round up ten thousand international criminals swarming over Europe just after the armistice of World War I — "the greatest crime wave in history."*

Karl Detzer has always been particularly interested in "official" detec-

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tives — the result, unquestionably, of his unremitting efforts to depict realism. Here is the story of a Michigan state trooper, written by someone who obviously knows the real-life mechanics of manhunting on a grand scale — the story of a professional policeman whose professional problem is also a personal one . . .

BANK JOB

by KARL DETZER

THE RADIO UNDER THE DASH HAD been silent for five minutes except for the low, continuous bustle of static. The patrol car splashed ahead at a steady forty-five, its headlamps burning a shallow hole in the rain. It was rolling north again on U. S. 31, once more covering the same ten-mile sector it had been patroling since four o'clock. Somewhere over to the right, in one of those cold, wet swamps, the bank bandits probably were hiding.

Trooper Jim Smith shifted uneasily behind his wheel and stared through the spattered windshield at the darkness. He was only four months out of recruit school and this was his first bank job. If he'd ever guessed that it would turn out this way, that he'd be called so soon to choose between wanting to do his job right and . . . he swallowed hard, trying to dislodge the plug in this throat.

Sergeant Casey, who rode beside him, yawned. He warned, "Keep to your side of the yellow line, ree-cruit. Can't drive all over the road, even if there ain't traffic. What's eatin' you?"

Jim shrugged and didn't answer. Usually Casey hadn't much to say. He was an oldtimer as state troopers go, forty-six his next birthday, and fighting hard against his waistline. In this kind of weather he often got grouchy when the dampness began to sink into that big shrapnel scar on his shoulder. This wasn't *his* first bank job by a good many dozen. For twenty years he'd been chasing hoodlums all over Michigan, ever since he got mustered out of the Rainbow Division and first pinned on a trooper badge. But this time he insisted on an answer, repeating, "What's eatin' you, anyhow?" and grunting, and turning in his seat to look hard at Jim Smith by the reflection of the dashboard light.

"Nothing's eating me, Sarge," Jim replied. "I'm okay. Nothing wrong at all." But his voice didn't sound right, even to his own ears. It sounded sort of choked. He knew that Sergeant Casey was nobody's fool. He'd been a cop long enough to spot a phony voice when he heard one. But Casey didn't say anything, just

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grunted again and looked ahead through the windshield, and after a minute began to swear quietly to himself about the rain.

Smith drove with his left hand, with his right dipped into his tunic pocket for cigarettes. He offered one to Casey.

"No, thank you kindly," the sergeant refused, and rummaged in the dash compartment for his pipe. He found it and was stuffing the bowl from his pouch when the radio blared.

"Attention all cars on bank job. The woman customer who was shot in the chest by the bandits has regained consciousness. Her descriptions are as follows: Number One, six feet, one hundred sixty pounds, age about eighteen, dark brown hair, medium complexion, very nice looking, scar on left cheek. . . ."

Jim gripped the wheel tighter. That was the third witness who'd noticed the scar. The radio still was talking, telling what the other two bandits looked like. Jim swallowed again. But he wasn't listening. His own kid brother fitted that first description to a T . . . height, weight, age, hair, complexion, scar . . . young Charley, who didn't like the farm any more than Jim had, who had to stick there when Jim got picked for drill school, who didn't want to take his turn at planting potatoes and looking after stock. Charley knew all about this bank in Pineville that had been stuck up. It was only twenty miles from home. The Smith family never had banked there, never had banked much anywhere, but Charley knew all about it just the same.

Not that he was the kind of kid to stick up a bank. He wasn't. He was a good kid. But his pockets always *were* empty. Whose weren't, just working on a farm? And he'd taken to hanging around town half the time, days as well as evenings. Jim had talked to him about it just last Sunday when he was home for two hours. He had seen young Charley when Car 88 rolled through Pineville on Saturday night patrol. The kid was loafing on the corner right beside this same bank, waiting for the nine o'clock show to start. Anybody, passing, would see him. He was just too good-looking to miss.

The scar on his cheek where the horse kicked him once didn't spoil his looks. It just made folks glance at him twice. Jim didn't know the two fellows with him that night; round-shouldered little guys they were, and dressed sort of flashy. But Charley got mad when Jim mentioned them.

He argued that he was old enough to do as he pleased, wasn't he? To pick his own friends, too. He was eighteen.

Jim shrugged. Sure, Charley was eighteen. Lots of boys were that age. What matter if the rest of the description fitted, too? Must be plenty of nice-looking, six-foot boys with brown hair and scars. Plenty of them. Sure there were. It couldn't be Charley!

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Couldn't! It had been a mistake ever to start worrying.

"Can't be any mistake about it," Casey suddenly said, as if he were reading Jim's mind.

"What you mean, no mistake?" Jim roared. "Sure it's a mistake!" Jim stopped short, realizing that Casey had turned again and was giving him one of those long looks.

"Well, for gosh sakes, try keepin' your shirt on," he advised. "No mistake, I'm thinkin', none a-tall. Easy to get the one guy. No chance for mistake when three eye-witnesses . . . cashier before he died, little kid that got shot in the leg, and now this here lady . . . when all three of them give the identical same description. You can just close your eyes and see this one tall guy . . ."

"Mebbe," Jim said, and cleared his throat. "Mebbe that's right." But he need not close his eyes. He could see plainly enough, just staring ahead at the rain. See Charley, tall and good-looking in spite of that scar. See him doing his chores down by the barn. See him driving the team at potato-digging time, hauling the crop to the root cellar. See him dressed up for town. See him the way he used to be, a nice little kid with big eyes. And see him the way he was last Sunday, mad clear through at everybody, slouching even when he walked, wanting some money of his own. Talking about nothing else.

"Hey," Casey warned, "you got two wheels off the concrete." He waited till Jim straightened out the car again. "Most times," he said, "preserve me from a flock of eye-witnesses. Bankers and women is worst. Can't see straight when they're scared. Give you three or four descriptions of the hoodlums afterward. You can't tell whether to look for the Governor or Shirley Temple. . . ."

The radio interrupted. "Car 17," it directed, "on U. S. 25 south of Muttonville, an accident. First repeat."

Jim settled back . . . one message, at least, that had nothing to do with the bank job. Casey was talking again, which again was unusual.

"Yes, sir, ree-cruit, it's goin' to be easy. Good description to start on, and we know enough else about these hoodlums. . . ."

"What else?" Jim asked quickly.

"Why, we know just what sort of birds they are. Small-time punks. Not been at it long. Shoot hard as anybody else, but don't know how to get away as easy."

"How you know they're punks?"

"First place 'cause they took off this here little one-horse bank. 'Cause they pull a job up here in the sticks where there ain't many roads or bridges and we can blockade 'em nice. 'Cause afterwards they lam north 'stead of south. If they had sense to pour sand out a boot, they'd know we'd corner 'em up north. They ain't got a chance. Now this kid with the scar. . . ."

"What about him?" Jim asked.

"Well, I was wonderin'. Seems like I've seen a kid answers that

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look-out, kid hangin' around somewheres. . . ."

Jim turned his head. The sergeant wasn't even glancing at him, but certainly there was something suspicious in his voice. The rain drummed noisily on the top of the car and the tires made a continuous sucking sound against the pavement. Roaring across muddy fields between black patches of pine woods, where the soggy snow still hid in little pockets, the squally northeast wind found the car and pummeled it.

"If I could just get to a 'phone," Jim said.

"You 'phoned twice already. What's so almighty important?"

"Nothing important," Jim said. He *had* telephoned home twice. And Charley was out both times, had been away since early morning and the folks didn't know where he was. Hadn't even come home to do his chores. That last call was at seven o'clock. It was past nine right now; he might be there. . . .

The radio awakened. A bell struck three quick taps. Then the dispatcher's tired voice said: "Signal seven-one-one. Signal seven-eleven. Signal seventy-one-one."

"Huh!" Casey said. "Something comin' up?" His tone was almost enthusiastic. "That signal's for the skipper. Want him to 'phone his office. Think maybe them satchel-pants district detectives decided to go to work, after all? Turned something up? Hope so. I sure want some shut-eye."

"Not me," Jim said. "Not sleepy a-tall."

He wasn't. His nerves were too tight for sleep. He'd been driving since noon when the first radio dispatch came in. The bandits still were in Pineville Bank then. They'd gone in shooting like amateurs, one with a tommy-gun, and the cashier hadn't a chance. But as he dropped with four slugs in him he tripped the new silent alarm. That gave the law a break. It registered not on the front of the bank, where it would warn the robbers to hurry, but in the sheriff's office, so the blockade got started while the hoodlums still were scooping the money into sacks.

Within five minutes eighty cars had started to close in, blocking crossroads and bridges as the radio directed them. They had made a ring of men and guns fifty miles from the bank that no bandits, neither smart old hands nor dumb young punks, could hope to break. That ring still was holding. Twenty other cars, like this same number 88, had sped inside the circle and begun to cruise, shaking down everything they met, raiding shacks, putting the bee on farmers who might think it smart to shelter a bank mob. In the hunt by now were sheriffs of a dozen counties, police of a hundred small towns, checking every car at their city limits.

"Them posses of Legionnaires and farmers must be gettin' plenty wet," Casey suddenly remarked. He turned up the radio. It reported railroad

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detectives in Grand Rapids were searching all southbound freights; game wardens in Manistee and Benzie Counties with portable transmitters were out in the swamps; at seven o'clock the four coast guard stations along Lake Michigan had sent out surfmen in pairs to watch the dunes. "Gettin' lots of free help."

Jim nodded. Just before dark the dispatcher had reported that even country telephone operators were spreading the alarm, grinding out long and short rings on party lines, warning farmers to keep eyes and ears open and doors locked. The dispatcher signed off and immediately Casey said:

"Lots o' talk but no news. Don't tell nothing. Nary a word whether they found fingerprints."

Jim felt a sudden relief. At least Charley never had been printed. Never any reason to be. He was a good kid, wasn't he? No matter what, they'd not find *him* in those green steel cases in the record room down at East Lansing.

"One fingerprint's worth a dozen scars," Casey said.

Jim turned and looked at him this time. Why didn't Casey come right out and mention Charley, instead of hinting around about scars? It was Jim who had introduced Charley to old Casey, that Sunday when the kid came down to visit recruit school and Casey had been in charge for the day. But the sergeant didn't say anything more, just kept on growling about the weather. The weather would help, eventually. Twice already police cars had flushed out the bandits, and twice, thanks to luck, they'd got away.

But they weren't riding now. They were afoot, in the rain. The Seventh District captain had shot it out with them over west of Manton, and they'd ducked into the woods, leaving their sedan with its rear end full of holes, like a pepper box, in the middle of a gravel road.

"They won't stay out long," Casey said. "Not them birds."

"Why not?" Jim asked.

"Ain't got the guts. Mud an' dark in the woods, why, it'll give 'em the creeps. They'll run for the concrete. I know their kind. I seen it happen. . . ."

The radio bell rang. Jim slowed the car to listen. Creeps? Mud and dark wouldn't give Charley the creeps. . . .

"Attention everybody!" the radio warned. "Three armed men stole black sedan near Karlin forty minutes ago. Headed north."

"What'd I tell you?" Casey demanded. He grunted and lighted his pipe.

The radio was directing: "Car 14, join Car 106 at Fife Lake corner. Car 72, go to Betsie bridge on Highway 115. Car 46, meet Sheriff White at Maple City. Car 19, go to filling station at Buckley. See the man. Information. Cadillac sheriff, please hold your bridge guards, and thanks. Car 88. . . ."

"That's us!" Jim shouted.

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"Shut up an' listen," Casey barked. "Car 88, go to M22 and County Road 76 in town of Empire. Shake down everybody. . . ."

"Empire!" Jim exclaimed.

"What about it?"

"Why, he's got . . . I got . . . a cousin lives there," Jim said. "That's all."

His voice dwindled off, but it wasn't all. Charley went up to Empire every summer to pick cherries on the cousin's farm, knew the country like his own barnyard. If Charley, trying to get away . . .

"Empire's to hell an' gone from here," Casey grumbled. "Twenty-thirty miles."

Jim tramped the accelerator and headed north. Scattered farmhouses showed only dark windows on the wet empty road. Bandits or no bandits, most folks were staying home in such weather and going to bed early. At the crossroad in Benzonia, another patrol car stood with bomb flares burning and a sign that ordered, "Halt. Police Blockade."

Jim touched his siren and slowed momentarily, till the trooper beside the other car lowered his shotgun and waved him on. Jim recognized him, a fellow from Manistee post. Looked like he needed a cup of coffee. Jim roared down the hill into Beulah.

"Hey," Casey said. "Eighty's too fast."

"Too fast?"

"Slow down," Casey said, and then he remarked, for no reason, "Me, I'm sorry for their family."

"Family!" Jim exclaimed. He looked at Casey quickly, then back at the dark wet road. Hang it all, why didn't Casey come out and say what he thought? Why didn't he ask where Charley was supposed to be right now? Why didn't he . . .

"Take no chances!" the dispatcher was warning. "These men are desperate!"

"Something comin' up now," Casey said quietly. "Look. Parked car ahead."

Jim slowed. He hadn't seen it. Eyes right on the road, and he hadn't seen it. But there it was, standing on the shoulder without lights.

"Pull in behind 'em," Casey directed. "I'll shake 'em down. You stay at the wheel." He reached for the shotgun and jerked it from its clamps against the roof. "Keep your shirt on, kid."

As their lights picked out the wet details of the machine ahead, Jim suddenly wanted to yell. Wanted to shout that it was all a mistake. That there wasn't any need checking that car. That they'd better go on patroling. For if this wasn't his kid brother's jalopy . . . same make and model, same dirty color, same bent fenders, same empty spare tire rack, same . . .

"Keep your shirt on," Casey repeated. Patting his pocket to make sure the extra shells were there, he climbed out. Jim took a long breath, gripped his pistol, lifted it slowly, and took aim through the windshield. He waited while Casey splashed for-

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ward, the shotgun cradled in his arm . . . waited while the sergeant jerked open the door of the jalopy.

Casey's lips were moving. Jim could see that much, even though the storm wiped out the voice. He could see, too . . . he took a long breath, and his fingers shook. Why, he could see the license now! Of all the dumb recruits he was dumbest! He'd been staring all the time at the license. It wasn't Charley's number. This was a Kent County plate. It wasn't Charley. . . .

And Casey had slammed the door. He was tramping back.

"Now, ain't young love wonderful?" he asked.

A deputy sheriff with a small badge pinned to his wet overcoat and three drenched men in Legion caps waited at the crossroad in Empire. Two of them carried deer rifles, one a stout club, the fourth a flashlight. They signaled the patrol car to halt.

"Better stop quick," Casey warned. "Posse can get awful enthusiastic. When it does, it starts shootin'." He leaned hurriedly from the window and yelled, "Hiya, sheriff. It's us. State police." He made his voice jovial for once.

The deputy advanced cautiously on soggy shoes. With his flashlight full in Casey's face he halted. Then he came on and put one wet foot on the running board.

"Three hours and ain't nary a cat tried to get past!" he said glumly. "I got chores to do at home. . . ."

Jim reached for a cigarette, nervously offered one to the deputy. Chores. Charley hadn't done his chores. Not at seven o'clock. But there might be a chance now . . . he *might* be home by now. If he were, it would mean he wasn't running from cops . . .

"Listen, Sarge," Jim said. "I got to 'phone! I'll be just a minute!"

" 'Phone?" Casey yelled. "Now? Right in the middle of a chase? Good Lord, no!"

" 'Phone right there in the filling station." The deputy was pointing across the road, and Jim seized the chance.

"Take me only a minute, Sarge. . . ."

Casey turned and stared at him. Then he chuckled suddenly. "That's a new one," he said. "Ree-cruit havin' to 'phone! Well, go on. Get it over with. Tell her it breaks your heart these here bandits spoiled your date." He chuckled again.

Jim was pressing the door handle as the radio bell struck. The deputy quickly thrust his head into the car window and his hat brim dripped on Jim's knees. There was excitement this time in the dispatcher's voice. He bit off his words and spit them at the microphone.

"Attention, all cars! Special attention, Car 88! Machine with one headlight believed to be bandits went north through Lake Ann five minutes ago. Eluded posse at crossroads there. Traveling fast. . . ."

"Get going, kid," Casey said.

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". . . Car 88, go east on county road 76 for three miles. Head 'em off." The dispatcher's voice still was excited. The deputy sheriff jerked back his head. "Sheriff at Maple City, hold your crossroad. Car 92, start west on county line road. We've got these babies cornered . . . hold on . . ." the radio paused, then added, "That's right. Car is positively identified as belonging to bandits!"

"Step on it," Casey said. His voice was calm. He leaned out and shouted back, "Thank you kindly, men, thank you kindly."

". . . took a shot just now at a farmer begging a lift. Car 91, hold your post. Car 18, take bridge at Cedar. Traverse City police, send your car west on Long Lake road. Car 164 . . . wait a minute, here's something else . . . bandit car is headed for Empire. . . ."

"What's that you say?" Casey demanded.

"Nothing," Jim answered. He hadn't meant to say anything, didn't believe he *had* said anything. Empire. Couldn't it have been any car but this one dispatched tonight to Empire . . . ?

The dispatcher was continuing: "Remember, 88, bandit car has one light. You'll meet it, 88. Bound to, if they keep on coming. . . ."

Jim's foot went down to the floorboard. They were climbing a hill. Beyond it, this hill or another, they'd meet a jalopy. Jalopy or something better. It didn't matter what. Didn't matter one light or two, Charley Smith would be in it. And they'd shoot it out. Sergeant Casey and he himself, Charley Smith's brother, would take their guns and shoot it out with a green kid who didn't know any better . . . who did know better . . . who didn't. . . .

They were swinging a curve into a down-grade. Jim saw the sergeant reach for the shotgun. Straight ahead, beyond the next rise, there it came . . . a blur of white light soaking upward in the rain. . . .

"Car coming," Jim managed to say.

"Yeh," Casey agreed. He was fussing with a handful of shotgun shells. "If it's them . . . um . . . we'd best stop right here. See that culvert ahead? Straddle it."

Jim stepped on the brake. His car wobbled, halted at last.

"That's right," Casey said. "Turn her a little. Block the road. You get in the ditch."

Once more the oncoming light flashed against the rain, brighter this time. Casey snapped off their own headlamps. Then he climbed out.

"In the ditch, kid," he repeated, "never mind the water." Something made him chuckle. "No rats in this war, anyhow. Keep your head down."

"It's him!" Jim shouted.

The car flashed over the hill. It was roaring toward them.

"Yeh, it's them," Casey agreed.

That had been a single headlamp lighting the sky. It was coming fast. Too fast to mean anything except chase . . . or escape. Jim ran for the

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ditch. One headlight . . . trying to get to Empire . . . not home for chores . . . scar . . . tall . . . nice looking. . . .

"Head down!" Casey repeated.

The car was only a quarter-mile away. An eighth of a mile. Jim could hear it roaring down the grade. It wasn't a jalopy. Came too fast. Charley always did like to go fast. . . .

"Aim steady, kid!" Casey sang out. "If you got to shoot, do it quick!"

The car was two hundred yards away and doing sixty when Jim heard the yell of its brakes. He looked quickly over his shoulder. Casey waved his flashlight once, snapped it off, grabbed his shotgun, and took aim.

The one-eyed car was screeching, twisting, trying hard to stop. They knew they were trapped. Jim raised his pistol. It was awfully heavy. His fingers felt numb, holding it. Numb, like his knees in this cold ditch water. Aiming at Charley, was he? Aiming to shoot him? He let the pistol waver. The oncoming light swept its beam crazily across the road, right and left, wiping a brief white streak in the night, touching old Casey, standing there, with the shotgun in his hands.

Then the light went out. The car had halted, thirty yards away. For an instant there was only wet darkness. Then a dozen quick flashes spurted from the black bulk of the bandit car and Jim heard the ping of the slugs. Someone was shooting at Casey. Someone with the tommy-gun. A tall young fellow, nice looking, with a scar. Voices shouted and a car door slammed. Casey didn't fire. What was he waiting for? Jim yelled, "Sarge!" No answer. "Sarge!" he cried.

He found Casey on his knees beside his car. The shotgun lay on the wet pavement. Casey was holding the fender with both hands, trying to get to his feet. He was being sick.

"Let . . . 'em get me . . ." he said. He tried to laugh. "Let . . . them punks . . . get me. . . ."

Old Casey wasn't as heavy as Jim had imagined. Only the car door was too narrow. But he got him in. A slug was in his shoulder.

"Hurt a lot?"

Casey tried to laugh. "Not . . . a lot."

Jim staggered up. It couldn't matter now whose brother that was. "Give me the shells," he heard himself yelling. He took them, snatched up the shotgun. "Be right back, Sarge," he promised.

Running, he didn't think to bend low. Didn't Charley know he'd catch him? Hadn't he always caught him, ever since they were kids? Even in the dark he could see where the gang had raced down the muddy bank. A snag of somebody's raincoat hung on the barbed-wire fence. Jim ducked through it and halted, listening.

They were over that way, down the hill. He ran, following the sound.

Back on the road he heard a police siren coming. Some other car, that meant. It would find Casey. He ran on. He needn't turn back now. For

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anything. Needn't turn till the job was done.

A voice shouted: "Dropped it in the mud. Busted it."

"Let it go," someone answered. "Don't need it."

Jim didn't recognize either voice. They were too far off. It didn't matter, anyway. Didn't matter, either, what they had dropped; even when he tripped over it, the tommy-gun, he didn't pause. He didn't want it, any more than they did. He still could hear them. But they didn't hear him. Or else they didn't care.

"Where the hell we goin'?" one of them yelled. "Me, I want the road. Get another car. Hell with the woods."

Jim slowed, and moved forward more silently. Casey had said they would find the swamp too tough. Jim could hear them arguing. He tried to make out the voices. But still he couldn't. He could see them, though. Suddenly, in the darkness of the woods, his wet eyes made out the three darker shadows. He knelt in the swamp water and carefully lifted the shotgun. What would his mother say, if they brought bad news about Charley?

The three plunged toward him, still crashing through the brush. Going back to concrete, were they? He couldn't tell which was tallest. Couldn't see what they looked like. Whether any of them had a scar. But one did have a scar. Three witnesses had said. . . .

"Halt, you!" he sang out.

The three halted.

"What's this, a gag?" a voice demanded.

"I'll shoot," Jim said. He felt very calm. Nothing mattered. If he had to shoot, he had to shoot. If that was Charley nearest him, it was Charley.

"Shoot, then," one of the figures said.

"If I could see him," another muttered.

So they couldn't see him, here on his knees. He had that advantage.

"Who the hell are you, anyhow?" the voice demanded.

"Drop your gun, you," Jim bade. "Drop it."

There was a flash, instead. So they wanted to shoot him, too, did they? Jim's finger closed on the trigger. Slowly. Squeezing the way he'd been taught on the range. The fellow who'd tried to shoot at him sang out as he fell.

"Rest of you want the same?" Jim asked. They didn't.

"How many guns?" Jim asked. "Throw 'em in the brush!" He heard one crash.

"Pick up your man," he bade them. "Carry him. Face into the rain. It'll take you to the road."

They did not resist. But it took both of them to lift the man Jim had shot. He was tall, seemed heavy, and they kept tripping.

"I'm right behind you," Jim warned. "Now, which of you is Charley?"

"Huh?" the voice asked. "Another gag? No Charley here."

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At the edge of the woods Jim met the corporal from the Traverse City post and a couple of troopers coming to help him. Two new police cars and the sheriff's sedan stood at the road by the culvert. Casey still was there, propped up in his own seat. He was smoking his pipe, swearing, while two of the boys, who had taken his tunic off, were binding the hole in his shoulder. He wasn't being sick any more. When he saw Jim, he said, "Three dirty punks, kid, just like I said." He shouted at the hoodlums, "Where you birds from?"

"Chicago," one answered. He was a hungry-looking guy. All three looked hungry. And scared. And dumb. One did have a scar. But he didn't look like Charley. Not a bit.

"What'd I tell you, kid?" Casey demanded. "City punks. Anybody'd know it, way they done the job. No farm kid would make all them mistakes." He paused. "Ouch!" he said. "Just punks."

"Sure," Jim said. "That's right."

He was feeling easy. Over to the west a flock of cars were rushing down the hill. Posse men tumbled out. Troopers were patting him on the back, calling it nice work to bring in all three. One of them shouted, "Come on, boys. Get Casey and this lug to the hospital."

"Me?" Casey said. "Oh, all right. Only first, on the way, leave Jim here get to a 'phone. He's been havin' an awful time. Something awful important to call about." He chuckled.

"Thanks, Sarge," Jim said. "Never mind. Nothing to call about now . . ."

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THE CASE OF THE HOLE IN THE ICE

by AUSTIN RIPLEY

RUDOLPH MAYER STUMBLED INTO the police station of the little village of Monroe, shook water from his clothes, and collapsed. A local physician was summoned and brought Mayer around. He told the following story.

"My wife and I, fond of winter sports, registered at the Fox Head Resort this afternoon — I've spent several vacations here. Shortly before dusk we decided to go skating on Lake Howard. We'd been out probably twenty minutes, as nearly as I can figure it, when my wife, who was about ten yards in front of me, suddenly dropped into the water through a large hole. Someone must have been cutting ice. I swerved, took off my skates, and jumped in after her. Despite my efforts, however, I couldn't locate her. I was barely able to pull myself out, and as I called and there was no help at hand, made my way here, somehow. It's about half a mile, I guess, and I didn't think I'd be able to do it. For God's sake send someone out there!"

Again the man fainted but was revived in a few minutes, mumbling incoherently about skates.

Two constables were dispatched through the ten below zero weather to the scene and returned with Mayer's skates found on the edge of a large hole where a local concern had been cutting ice. At the sight of them Mayer again collapsed.

Professor Fordney read no further in the above newspaper account.

"Mayer is certainly lying," he said to himself.

How did he know? You will find the solution at the bottom of the page, printed upside-down.

If the newspaper account were correct Mayer was lying. He could not possibly have been in the water, walked half a mile through ten below zero weather, and then shaken water from his clothes. Had the tragedy happened as he described it, the water on his clothes would have been frozen.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

MURDER BY THE BOOK *by REX STOUT* (VIKING, $2.50)	"Solid sending." (LGO)	"Wolfe and Archie are in top form and Stout has rarely done a better novelistic job . . ." (AB)
THE LONG DIVORCE *by EDMUND CRISPIN* (DODD, MEAD, $2.50)	"'Mr. Datchery's' reasoning is solid and his manner as sprightly as ever, but there's not enough of him. B minus." (LGO)	". . . very fine Crispin . . . supporting characters of real stature." (DBH)
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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . honest, lively, interest-holding performance. Among his best." (SC)	". . . a pleasing addition to the canon . . . swift, effortless and diverting . . ." (JS)	
"Told with author's usual wit, skill, and sapience . . . Genial and adroit." (SC)	"Each one of Edmund Crispin's charming and witty adventures . . . has been increasingly delightful . . ." (JS)	
"Skill and interesting tale . . . but . . . giving away the mystery at midpoint lets suspense down . . ." (KS)	"Readers might . . . complain at being whipped into the author's confidence . . . fast and full of bumps." (JS)	
". . . cleanly and vigorously written with a sympathetic comprehension of the policeman-as-human-being . . ." (AB)	". . . unassuming tale . . . answer . . . is a satisfying surprise . . . prose is utilitarian . . ." (JS)	
". . . female blindness and nicety involved that irritate; but . . . well managed suspense." (KS)	". . . cumbersome . . . some excellent courtroom dramatics, but they tend to get lost in the telling." (JS)	
". . . unreadable. Painfully heavy prose, wildly improbable plot . . ." (AB)	". . . torturous and somewhat overelaborate story. But . . . most entertaining book." (HT)	
"Personnel authentic; goings-on lively; emotional turbulence extreme. Easy to take." (SC)	"Though the tone is a bit cheaper than in Fischer's best work, the Fischer virtues are still present." (AB)	
"Tidy sample kit." (SC)	". . . diverting . . . The level of writing is as various as might be expected." (JS)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in The New York Times*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review of Literature*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in The Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle*

JS: *James Sandoe in The New York Herald Tribune*

KS: *Kathleen Sproul in The Saturday Review of Literature*

HT: *Unsigned review in The New York Herald Tribune*

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THE BIRTH OF A NOTION

It all began during a Sunday breakfast at the Ashtons', in Glasgow, Scotland. That meal in the Ashton house is something of a traditional affair — a long, leisurely, disputatious festival, during which all the members of the Ashton family eat, argue, drink, argue, and are merry, arguing. And, you must understand, on every conceivable subject, no holds or basic premises barred. Thus, all sorts of hare-brained notions come into being, to be hotly defended by their progenitor against the withering scorn of the listeners. Now (to continue the author's own account of the proceedings), on this particular morning, the London "Sunday Times" was adorned by a piece on Sherlock Holmes written by no less an aficionado than the gasogene-cum-tantalus of the world-famous Baker Street Irregulars, Mr. Christopher Morley. This charming and scholarly article caused one of those delightfully nostalgic discussions which the merest whisper of Baker Street always sets into motion. Carried away by sentiment and enthusiasm, the eldest Ashton suddenly found himself propounding an utterly unforgivable heresy, which was received by the other Ashtons with shrill and outraged protests. "By Mycroft," roared the head of the family, "that's how it was, and I'll prove it!"

Although the senior Ashton had the uncomfortable feeling that he had gone a wee bit too far, nevertheless, if he were ever to hold up his head again at the Sunday morning bull-and-coffee sessions, he would have to deliver the goods. So, that very day, he began to reread the Baker Street saga — and lo, the proof fairly stared him in the face!

Mr. Edward G. Ashton, the perpetrator of the monstrous theory, wishes it clearly understood that though his article was the proximate cause, Mr. Morley is completely innocent of any complicity; no jury in the world would find Mr. Morley guilty, even as an accessory before the fact. The guilt — if there is any — rests solely on Edward G. Ashton, S.S. (Sherlockian Scholar).

And now, meet the eight members of the Examining Body of The Three Eyes (International Investigators, Inc.) — Lord Peter Wimsey,

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Miss Jane Marple, Father Brown, and Dr. Gideon Fell, representing England; Uncle Abner, Ellery Queen, and Sam Spade, representing the United States; and Arsène Lupin, representing France. And oh, yes, one other — "obliquely referred to — offstage" — who shall remain, at least for the purposes of this sleuthian salad, nameless . . .

INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATORS, INC.

by E. G. ASHTON

As he sipped his brandy, his lordship decided that he was quite entitled to feel pleased with himself. The dinner party had been a great success, and it now seemed likely that they could proceed to the business of the evening without disaster.

The gathering, of course, had not been without its hazards, but his lordship flattered himself that he had done everything possible to reduce the risks to the minimum. A simple meal — perfectly cooked and served, naturally — had subtly coaxed them into sociability, and serving with it a brisk young Beaujolais had been a master stroke, even for him. His lordship had pondered long before selecting it in preference to the more obvious Chateau Lafitte — after all, one could never be sure just how underbred palates would appreciate Beaujolais — but his instinct had been right and the risk had come off. For which good fortune his lordship was grateful, being modestly aware that he had some reputation to maintain in matters of connoisseurship.

Most pleasing of all, however, was the fact that the meal had passed off without the slightest hint of awkwardness or the least display of temperament among the guests — and those familiar with the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of the members of the Examining Body will appreciate that no greater tribute could be paid to his lordship's abilities as a host.

Cupping his brandy ballon in his hands and reflectively sniffing the bouquet (Courvoisier, naturally; the Armagnac would have been wasted on them), his lordship permitted his eye to roam over the guests. A distinguished lot, of course, but like all geniuses, they required the most delicate handling if they were not to break out into regrettable and childish tantrums. They were so easily upset that even their common interest in detection did not guarantee uncomplicated social intercourse. They all had their own little peculiarities, and it was a wise host who managed to cope with them.

For instance, there was the Virginia

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squire in his old-fashioned evening clothes who was even now discoursing gravely to the amiable elderly lady from England. Decidedly a character, the old boy — charming in the heavy manner of the old school and quite handsome in a rock-carved sort of way — but his habit of traveling everywhere on that great chestnut horse of his was apt to be a shade disconcerting for his hosts. Not, of course, for his lordship — somehow the invaluable Bunter had procured stabling and fodder for the beast. A wonderful manservant, Bunter. Nothing could throw him out of his stride — not even the genial Dr. Thorndyke's habit of carrying his precious green case wherever he went, even, it was said, into the shower room. Unfortunately, Dr. Thorndyke had been unable to come tonight — he was, his lordship's long nose wrinkled happily, doubtless sitting up with a sick microscope slide; but enough members were present to form a quorum for the evening's business.

"And talking of business," murmured his lordship to himself, " 'if it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' Dash it, there I go again! I really must stop this beastly habit of quoting things. So overdone since it's been taken up by Inspector Appleby, Gervase Fen, and that monstrous regiment of Eng. Lit. women who keep discovering corpses on college campuses." He paused for a moment to muse, then suddenly recollected himself and said aloud, "Fellow members of the Examining Body! May I suggest we prepare for our official session?"

In a fantastically short time the debris of the meal had been removed and the uncovered oak refectory-table winked back to the lights overhead. In front of each chair was set a snowy island of scratch paper. His lordship took his place in the huge chairman's throne, and waved the others to sit.

"Fellow Examiners, the meeting is now in session. Will the secretary read the minutes of the last meeting?"

The secretary, the amiable English lady, was the only woman present. She dived into a large reticule and after spilling two knitting needles, a ball of fleecy wool, a crochet hook, and a grocery list at which she stared in some astonishment, she found the minutes-book of the society. She smiled at his lordship, bobbed her gray head to the others, and in a pleasant voice began to read.

From under drooping lids, his lordship studied the secretary. A delightful person, Miss Jane, in quite the finest tradition of English spinsters, good-hearted, honest, and inquisitive. Parochial, of course — she did not seem able to see beyond her own tiny village, and her claim that every wickedness which could happen anywhere had already happened there was obviously absurd — but very sweet and nice. And immensely helpful too. She had actually volunteered to become secretary and keep the

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minutes. At such enthusiasm for dreary labor, his lordship winced delicately, and resumed his study of the Examining Body.

There were eight of them present tonight — his lordship, Miss Jane, the Virginia squire, and five others. A queer collection, without a doubt. Take the Frenchman. Admittedly he was working for the law these days and the gentleman-cambrioleur era was behind him, but nevertheless his lordship never felt entirely comfortable about the security of his watch and wallet when the Frenchman was around. Silly, but there it was. And the Frenchman's trick of invariably appearing in disguise had become tiresome. Heaven knew his lordship was not insular in any degree, but really, there were times when the Gallic temperament became just a little wearing. But give the fellow his due, he was both clever and daring. Unfortunately for the Examining Body, the Frenchman never seemed to tire of admitting just how clever and daring he was.

His lordship much preferred the tall blond American with the yellow-gray eyes who was rolling himself a cigarette. A little physical in his methods, perhaps, and rather more clipped in style than his lordship could wholeheartedly approve, but the American's tough cynicism was decidedly an improvement on the Frenchman's bravura.

Miss Jane stopped reading, and the minutes were adopted on the motion of the quiet young American whose pince-nez protected pale silver eyes. His lordship rather liked the youngster — practically no palate, of course, but he dressed rather more reasonably than most Americans, his manners were excellent, and his Duesenberg was almost as good as the Merlin. Of his professional abilities, there was no need to speak — his membership on the Examining Body was sufficient testimony.

His lordship smoothed down his glittering yellow hair, screwed his monocle firmly into his eye, and rose.

"Miss Jane and gentlemen. It is, I am well aware, quite unnecessary to remind any of you of the aims, purpose, and function of our organization. Just the same, I intend to do so tonight — oh, quite briefly, Sam, I assure you," he added hastily as he saw the blond American raise a sardonic v-shaped eyebrow.

"I am going to do so for two reasons. One is that I disapprove of too much cerebral excitement so soon after a meal — in other words, we must give our jolly old tums time to deal with all the little vitamins and things — and the other is that I jolly well feel like doing it, so you'll have to lump it."

"Heh heh heh," chuckled a huge red-faced man with a bandit mustache, "'as my whimsey takes me,' hey?"

"Exactly, doctor," grinned his lordship. "Well, now. It is a good many years since our distinguished patron, the great Chevalier himself, founded the society which has come

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to be known as The Three Eyes — a rather weak pun on the initials of International Investigators, Inc., an organization which can truly be said to be unique, in the original and correct meaning of that much abused word.

"In The Three Eyes are gathered the greatest brains in the history of criminology. I admit that in the past there have been societies of a fairly similar pattern, but what raises us to our honored pinnacle is that we know no boundaries except those of intellect. We take our members from any and every country, practising by any and every code.

"The doctor here" — the man with the bandit mustache muttered "Harrumph" into a vast handkerchief, then beamed at his lordship — "the doctor has had his brilliant triumphs in England, but they are matched by the successes of the squire in Virginia."

The squire's gaze, oak-steady and unflinching as the courage of a mountain man, fixed upon his lordship, then after a pause during which a man might tell five slowly, the great frame bowed acknowledgement.

"Our estimable Sam" — the fair-haired Mephistopheles waved a sinewy hand in salute — "comes from a teeming, virile American city. Our adored Miss Jane" — the lady blushed and became flustered — "from a sleepy English village.

"Our French colleague has — er — operated on both sides of the fence" — the Frenchman sprang to his feet and, white teeth glistening in the black beard he was affecting tonight, bowed like a Gascon. "But," his lordship continued drily, "has he any advantage over our padre who knows all crimes without having committed a single one?" The tubby little cleric at the end of the table looked startled and managed to drop first his pencil and then his scratch-pad on the floor.

"And if I may be immodest and speak of myself for a moment, you all know that I bear the courtesy title of Lord. But naturally, in any well-conducted regime, a Lord must always be outranked by a —" His lordship made an elegant salute to the silver-eyed American, who almost succeeded in looking modest.

His lordship lit a cigarette and went on. "So much for those of us who are here tonight. But in my opinion, our greatest advantage as an organization is that we are not static. Our membership is not restricted to some arbitrary number. We are always prepared to accept newcomers, provided of course that they attain to the standards we have set. That those standards are high — very, very high — I shall not attempt to deny. For instance, it has always been a source of deep personal regret to me that my spiritual father, one of the greatest if not actually the greatest investigator ever produced by my country, has hitherto failed to satisfy our requirements."

"Perhaps," the plump little priest said mildly, "our requirements failed to satisfy him."

"Ann Chadwick's cook used to talk

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in riddles like that," murmured Miss Jane. "So irritating. Then one day she received a mysterious telephone call, went out, and never came back. Ann Chadwick was most upset."

"Somebody goosed her cook, huh?" Sam's fingers were busy with tobacco package and papers.

"Never mind that." The doctor sighted along his cigar at the chairman. "I agree with you about — ahem! — the absentee. Couldn't we do something about making him an honorary member, say?"

"No." His lordship's voice was regretful but firm. "Sorry, doctor, but it's out of the question. Apart from being against the constitution of The Three Eyes, it wouldn't be right to do it. Really, you know, after the mess he made of the Irene Adler affair, it wouldn't do — it wouldn't do at all."

"Hmf. He's not disbarred for life, then?"

"Oh, lor', no. If he pulls off something really clever and then applies for membership, I'm positive the Board will welcome him. I really must suggest it to him, next time I see him. However, all this is by the way, so I'll push on.

"Our custom has been that candidates wishing to join The Three Eyes submit a thesis upon some aspect of criminology. This work is then considered by the Examining Body in council, and if our verdict is favorable, the applicant is granted a Doctorate of Crime and admitted to the society. We have had some extremely interesting and informative papers in the past — I still remember with great pleasure the enlightening views offered by Mr. John J. Malone, of Chicago, in his excellent work, *The Influence of Alcohol Upon the Processes of Deduction*, and I shall always be grateful to Inspector John Appleby for his brilliant unmasking of the real murderer of Hamlet's father. I am certain that other theses will come readily to your minds.

"Tonight, it is my privilege to read to you a paper submitted by a Mr. — or it may be a Monsieur — LaMont. There is this slight dubiety because, apart altogether from the French sound of his name, I am given to understand that one of his relatives was a distinguished painter of the French school.

"I may add that Mr. LaMont's thesis will be the only one heard this evening. There was to have been another, from an American lady, but she appears to have confused her dates in some way. She has sent a note of apology. It reads," his lordship picked up a sheet of paper from the table, " 'Had I but known —' "

"Rejected! " shouted the Examining Body in one firm voice.

His lordship inclined his sleek head. "I could not agree with you more. That then leaves us only with Mr. LaMont's work to consider. With your permission, I shall sit down to read it."

In their various ways, the Examining Body prepared to listen. The doctor closed his eyes, Sam pasted a

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cigarette to his lip and stared at the ceiling, the Virginia squire set his great clasped hands on the table before him and looked attentively at his lordship, the Frenchman fondled his beard, Miss Jane edged forward on her chair, the silver-eyed American polished his glasses, and the little priest began to build a castle of sugar-lumps he had found in his pocket while looking for his handkerchief.

His lordship cleared his throat delicately and read the title of the work: "*The Greatest of Them All: An Investigation by T. A. LaMont.*" Then he plunged into the thesis itself. "'To the earnest student of criminology there can be no subject for deeper regret than the disappearance from the felonious scene of the master criminal, the king of crime who sat at the centre of a web, each strand of which reached out to the heart of some evil enterprise. No more does Dr. Fu Manchu bring the immemorial vices of the East to the Occident; Sophie Lang is notorious no longer; Simon Templar — The Saint — now abides by the law, even if he does not fully approve of it; Raffles has gone into virtual retirement; The Lone Wolf has prowled for the last time. Alas, the underworld is not the same. . . .

"'But it is not my intention in this paper to attempt any comparative evaluation of the great criminal masters — my apiarist pursuits do not leave me time to undertake so vast a work —' "

The doctor looked up sharply. "So?" he roared. "The wind blows in that quarter, hey? By Archons of Athens, I wouldn't — harrumph! Quite! Sorry!"

His lordship cocked a warning eye. "If I may continue — blah blah to undertake so vast a work — but I should like to discuss some aspects of the man who, in my opinion, represents the highest development of criminal genius. I refer to the late Professor Moriarty."

A tremor of excitement stirred among the guests. A grim smile touched the firm lips of the Virginian. "'Out of the eater came forth meat', " he quoted, and the deep voice rumbled like a drum in the quiet room. "Out of past evil shall come forth future good."

Unnerving old boy, thought his lordship. He tapped his papers gently to bring back their attention.

"'Unfortunately, all too little is known of the personal history of Moriarty, and the fragments which do exist have come to us in works written by Dr. Watson, the chronicler of Sherlock Holmes.

"'It is, I know, quite unnecessary to remind the Examining Body that Moriarty was Holmes's supreme antagonist. It is known that he actually defeated the investigator in the case that is called *The Valley of Fear*, and we may well speculate upon what further triumphs might have been his but for his too early disappearance at the Reichenbach Fall, as reported by Watson in *The Final Problem*. Holmes had the greatest respect and admira-

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tion for Moriarty — on several occasions he remarked to Watson with a somewhat wry smile that London was indeed a dull place without the evil shadow of Moriarty hanging over it. This is the kind of tribute which can be paid only by the really great to others of equal eminence'."

His lordship looked up. "Did you say something, padre?"

The little priest shook his head. "No, no. It was merely a giggle." He clasped his hands and beamed, like a happy child. "I *am* enjoying this. Do go on."

"I wish," said the Frenchman impatiently, "that our friend LaMont would come to the point. This aimless chatter fatigues me."

"Why, don't you like a lot of talk?" Miss Jane sounded surprised. "I do. The more the better."

"So does he, ma'am," thundered the doctor. "But only when he is doing the talking."

Before the bickering could spread, his lordship resumed his reading. "'Before considering the supra-legal activities of Professor Moriarty, however, it might be well to recapitulate briefly some of the more outstanding points of interest about the Holmes-Watson partnership at 221B Baker Street. After all, as we see our subject Moriarty almost solely through the eyes of one or other of the partners, it is only good policy to determine their value as witnesses and assess their relative strengths and weaknesses.

"'It has become customary to set Holmes down as brilliant and the doctor as a courageous, level-headed, but — let us face it — desperately stupid man. So stupid, in fact, that he does not even have the sense to suppress his own weaknesses of intellect, but cheerfully exposes them to the public gaze through the medium of his chronicles. There is, for notorious example, the occasion on which Holmes returns to the lodgings, tears a piece from a loaf and devours it voraciously. "You are hungry!" remarks the doctor, with astonishing perspicuity. This is not by any means an isolated instance. Time after time the doctor utters some fatuity so crass that the mind rejects its probability on the instant. By any standards, they are abysmal. By Baker Street standards, they are utterly incredible.

"'It is notorious that Holmes did not suffer fools gladly — his vicious outbursts at Lestrade and other officers from Scotland Yard testify to that. Is it likely then that for so many years he would tolerate a partner and colleague as congenitally feeble-minded as Watson makes himself out to be? Psychologically, I submit, it is quite out of the question'."

"*Bon.*" The Frenchman's beard bristled with appreciation. "Soundly reasoned — I could not have done better myself. I see what he is aiming at."

"Seeing what you aim at is simple — anyone can do that," remarked the priest abruptly. "But can you aim at what you see?" He looked at

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them and his eyes were very puzzled.

"May I," asked his lordship politely, "proceed?" Again he turned to the thesis. " 'Two further points of interest affecting the famous friendship I commend to your notice before we proceed to the matter of Moriarty. One concerns certain expressions and turns of speech much favored by Holmes, perhaps the most frequently burlesqued talker in literature. Familiar clichés such as "Elementary, my dear Watson" hardly require any elaboration at this date.

" 'The other point is the inimitable and total assurance of Holmes. Facts, clues, evidence could — and so far as he was concerned, did — point in only one direction. He lived, we might say, on a one-way street of logic. A man held himself erect — *ergo*, he was a soldier. No other explanation — that he might be a Marine or even a civilian suffering from a stiff neck — was ever considered for a moment. A noted critic has drawn attention to this singular characteristic in the now famous dictum that one slip on the part of the *criminal* would have brought Holmes's case crashing to the ground.

" 'Now, as to Moriarty. This king of crime had been a professor of mathematics at an English provincial University, and a brilliant one to boot, until at last driven from his Chair by the hot breath of scandal. Thereafter he went to London and became a crammer, one who stuffs young persons with just sufficient information to enable them to pass their examinations. This ex-professor, operating from his house in London, dominates the underworld of Europe and is brought in as a guest expert by even so powerful a group as the Scowrers of America. He is a veritable king among the kings of crime.

" 'So, at least, we are told.

" 'But who, we may legitimately inquire, is our informant? From whom do we hear these so-called facts? Why, none other than Holmes himself. The detective gives us two résumés of Moriarty's career, once in *The Valley of Fear* and later in *The Final Problem*. This should be reliable enough information, but once again it would be no more than simple caution to question it. Especially when we remember Holmes's tendency to regard only one side of the penny. He had decided that Moriarty was a crook, therefore Moriarty *was* a crook. It was as simple as that.

" 'But strangely enough, Scotland Yard had no clue whatsoever as to Moriarty's existence in a criminal role. At one point in *The Valley of Fear*, Inspector MacDonald says that at the Yard they thought that Holmes had a bee in his bonnet about the professor — not an uncommon thought at the Yard about Holmes's ideas, one must admit, but nevertheless indicative of their ignorance of a criminally-minded Moriarty.

" 'But the most crushing proof that Moriarty was not the man Holmes asserted him to be comes from Holmes himself. In *The Valley of Fear* Holmes cheerfully confesses

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to a flagrant crime — his breaking into and entering of Moriarty's house. Not only that, but he searched the house thoroughly — and found nothing incriminating or compromising! Nothing whatsoever. "That," remarks Holmes blithely, "was what amazed me."

" 'Familiar as we are with Holmes's preference for the complex rather than the simple solution, the tortuous rather than the straight path, it is certain that here he is flogging his favorite hobby-horse just too unmercifully.

" 'His search of the house was thorough. He was desperately anxious to prove his case, therefore he would have seized with pleasure upon the least trifle which could be construed as bolstering his theory. Had there been the tiniest jot of evidence against Moriarty in that house, most assuredly Holmes would have found it. Yet he found nothing. Why? Manifestly because there was nothing to find. And, as it is impossible to conduct any enterprise of magnitude without some sort of written record — even if it is no more than the plan of a bank to be robbed or a map showing where the body is buried — it follows that the Professor Moriarty suspected by Holmes was not the ruler of the underworld.

" 'Nevertheless, there was such a ruler. There was an expert whose services were engaged by the Scowrers. Holmes was quite right as to his existence, but erred as to his identity. Who then was this master?' "

"Something," grinned the young American, polishing his pince-nez, "tells me that I am not going to like his answer when I hear it."

" 'Who then was this master who kept his identity so cunningly concealed? Here, let me refer you to my remarks earlier regarding Holmes's favorite forms of phrase. The truth about the real Moriarty is, I believe, quite clearly indicated by two well-known Holmesisms, namely, "You know my methods, Watson," and, "When a doctor goes wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge." In other words, my dear Examiners, I submit that the underworld king who gave such desperate battle to Sherlock Holmes *was none other than Dr. Watson himself!*' "

His lordship could not proceed for the hubbub — half-outraged protest, half-delighted laughter — which rose from the Board. His lordship screwed the monocle back into his eye, peered again at the paper, and nodded firmly. "That's what it says here. Listen to what the crafty devil says next.

" 'I would like at this point to remind members of the Examining Body of the dictum that when the impossible has been eliminated, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth'."

"Ho ho ho," wheezed the vast doctor, "the devil can cite Scripture to his own purpose."

"But there's a lot more," went on his lordship. " 'When I first formulated this theory, my reaction was

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exactly what I suspect the Board's has been — an immediate rejection as being utterly beyond credence. But then I began to wonder. After all, it is not unknown in times of war for secret agents to penetrate into the enemy's territory, and even serve on the enemy's General Staff. Consider, then, how strong a position Watson would hold as confidant of the very man who was trying to catch him, often being told in advance the full details of the very plan being hatched to bring about his own undoing.

" 'Still more valuable to Watson was the fact that of all the men in the world, he was the one who knew Holmes's methods best. He knew them like the back of his hand, and Heaven knows he had them frequently re-explained just in case he ever forgot. It was child's-play for him to make his own counter-plans, based on an accurate knowledge of how Holmes would set about solving the case.

" 'And here at last we have a plausible reason for Watson's consistent self-depreciation in the stories. He presented himself as the stupid bungler because it kept suspicion away from him. No one, least of all Holmes, could ever have suspected dear old muffle-headed Watson of being a criminal, and a master criminal at that. It was a perfect disguise and was, in a way, a fresh twist to the device detected by the Chevalier in *The Purloined Letter*. By making himself so obviously a fool, Watson made himself invisible as a suspect.

" 'All this, you may contend, is merely supposition, but closer examination reveals evidence.

" 'Watson, by his own confession, was fond of a certain degree of high living. He frequented the Criterion Bar and was weak enough to overindulge in alcohol upon occasion. Combined with this weakness was an almost incurable indolence of nature — time after time we hear of him breakfasting after Holmes; and he had an extremely untidy streak, proof of which can be found in the famous anecdote of the two pictures, one framed, the other left unframed.

" 'Indeed, apart from these shortcomings of character which by themselves were sufficient to blast any hopes of a successful medical career, he does not even seem to have been a particularly knowledgeable doctor — his admissions of ignorance in *The Dying Detective* are a permanent blot upon the teachings of the University of London; and the fact that he was able to go gallivanting about the country with Holmes on his cases is a clear indication that his practice certainly did not flourish.

" 'Yet Watson had no private income. He was dependent upon his own exertions for money — yet, as we have seen, he neglected his medical practice shamefully. How then was he able to afford his way of life, the jaunts with Holmes? Obviously, he must have had a source of income which he did not mention in the chronicles, a source which he was careful to keep secret even from

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Holmes. But this secrecy was totally unnecessary — *unless the money was procured by some dishonest means* —

" 'But the real nub of my case against Watson is contained in what happened before, at, and after the incident at the Reichenbach Fall.

" 'There was first of all Holmes's report to Watson of his interview with Moriarty, or rather I should say, with the master criminal. Even in Holmes's drab and threadbare description, we can see that his visitor arrived heavily disguised. In Heaven's name why? There was no reason for Moriarty to disguise himself when calling upon Holmes; but there was every reason in the world why Watson should!

" 'Parenthetically, I should also like to draw your attention to a detail, a small but still useful brick in the edifice: namely, that Moriarty-the-criminal and Watson-the-chronicler were never seen together!

" 'Anyway, the man who called upon Holmes made a significant remark. He said, you recall, that he would be deeply sorry if he were forced to wipe out the detective. This statement is at least unexpected coming from a deadly enemy. On the other hand, it most exactly expresses what Watson's sentiments would have been in the circumstances.

" 'After the report of the interview, the chronicle goes on to detail some absurdly melodramatic rushing about London, leaping in and out of hansoms to a split-second timetable, and some exceedingly snap identifications by Holmes of total strangers as pursuers.

" 'The upshot of all this is that Holmes and Watson cross the Channel and begin a leisurely tour on the Continent. It is then — and this is the key point of my case — that Holmes receives a telegram informing him that the master criminal was not caught in the police net. Of course he was not! He had been carefully escorted out of the country by Holmes himself, and was standing by Holmes's side when the telegram arrived.

" 'I do not know precisely when it began to dawn on Holmes that for years he had been gulled by his crony, but I am satisfied that he was in possession of the true facts of the matter by the time they reached the Meiringen Hotel. On the instant (just several years too late) Holmes realized that he was in a peculiarly humiliating situation. It takes little effort to imagine how he would have been greeted by, say, Lestrade if he returned to London and admitted the success of Watson's deception. Sooner than make himself such a laughing-stock, Holmes would disappear — and finally.

" 'Or, at least, with the appearance of finality. He did not relish the idea of disappearing forever. But in a year or so, three at the outside, things would have blown over, and he could reappear in his old haunts.

" 'But what was to happen to Watson during this period? Obviously, he could not be permitted to con-

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tinue terrorizing London in his guise as Moriarty. The great criminal must vanish for good.

" 'In addition, Holmes had to make certain that the cause of Watson's criminal tendencies — that dreadfully weak moral fibre of his — disappeared too. His vicious tastes were acquired rather than inherent, and would in time respond to treatment. I have no doubt that Watson, on the advice and entreaty of Holmes, entered some sort of institution. Certainly, it is curious that Watson never mentioned precisely where he was during Holmes's three-years' absence.

" 'When the plans were settled, the pair staged the comedy at the Reichenbach Fall. Holmes carefully planted the alpenstock and cigarette case to be "discovered" later. The man "seen" by Watson walking towards the Fall was seen by nobody else, and was merely an invention. The doctor himself admitted that the message from the sick Englishwoman, his excuse for leaving the Fall, was a fake. But I have sometimes wondered about the messenger from the hotel, the Swiss lad who was never seen again. Did they, to add verisimilitude to the tale Watson was to tell, perhaps push —?

" 'The rest is soon told. In three years Watson is back in London. But so too is the human tiger, Colonel Moran, and, mark this well, Moran was the only man left who knew the criminal king by sight. What happened? Most opportunely — in fact, suspiciously so — Holmes reappears from the dead, and Moran is removed in short order.

" 'That ends my case, members of the Examining Body, against the greatest of them all — the king of the kings of crime, Dr. John H. Watson. If I may add a final word, *Experto crede.* (Signed) T. A. LaMont'."

"Well!" said Miss Jane. "Well!" The priest clapped his hands delightedly. The Frenchman caressed his beard. The doctor wheezed happily, the Virginia squire nodded his great head approvingly, and the silver-eyed American wore a charmed smile. Sam made himself another cigarette.

His lordship spoke. "I don't want to be accused of influencing you unduly, but I do want to say that if you don't elect this man immediately, you're blithering asses."

"One of the benefits of a liberal education" — the American detective fiddled dreamily with his pince-nez — "is that it makes one adept at solving simple anagrams."

"You don't miss much, do you? Well, let's put it to the vote. All those in favor of the election of Mr. T. A. LaMont? Those against? No Nos? Excellent. Then I have the pleasure and privilege of awarding a Doctorate of Crime to my great teacher, Mr. —"

"T. A. LaMont," warned the Body hurriedly.

His lordship groaned, then sighed happily. "Thanks. Nearly upset things at the last minute, didn't I? To Mr. T. A. LaMont. The meeting is now adjourned — until next year."

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Late in 1949, Pocket Books published THE BEST OF WODEHOUSE, *selected and with an Introduction by Scott Meredith. In this "sampler" — "a million dollars' worth of enjoyment" which went on to sell more than a million copies — Mr. Meredith included what he considered the best short story about each of Wodehouse's best-known characters. Thus, the sampler contains some of the finest tales about Jeeves (played in the movies by Arthur Treacher), Freddie Widgeon, Mr. Mulliner, Ukridge, Lord Emsworth, Bingo Little, and others. Mr. Meredith's choice of a Mulliner story was "Strychnine in the Soup," and if it isn't the best Mulliner, surely it is top-grade, A No. 1, nonpareil, one of the fairest flowers of the flock, and generally five-star of its kind.*

In his Introduction, Scott Meredith tells more about P. G. Wodehouse than you will find in all the standard biographical tomes. He points out, for example, that "Wodehouse is the only writer in the world who can cause other writers to stop raving about their own work and rave about his"; that "Wodehouse is one of those rare, genuinely modest people . . . who turns around to see who is standing there when the applause begins for him"; that "the secret of Wodehouse's magic art is about as easy to pin down as a strip of quicksilver in a pool of water"; and last, but decidedly not least, that all Introductions to Wodehouse are sheer lunacy, since "only a lunatic would continue to read this writer when he can be reading P. G. Wodehouse."

Mr. Meredith is a dyed-in-the-wool devotee — and who can blame him?

STRYCHNINE IN THE SOUP

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

FROM THE MOMENT THE DRAUGHT Stout entered the bar parlor of *The Anglers' Rest*, it had been obvious that he was not his usual cheery self. His face was drawn and twisted, and he sat with bowed head in a distant corner by the window, contributing nothing to the conversation which, with Mr. Mulliner as its center, was in progress around the fire.

From time to time he heaved a hollow sigh.

A sympathetic Lemon and Angostura, putting down his glass, went across and laid a kindly hand on the sufferer's shoulder.

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"What is it, old man?" he asked. "Lost a friend?"

"Worse," said the Draught Stout. "A mystery novel. Got halfway through it on the journey down here, and left it on the train."

"My nephew Cyril, the interior decorator," said Mr. Mulliner, "once did the very same thing. These mental lapses are not infrequent."

"And now," proceeded the Draught Stout, "I'm going to have a sleepless night, wondering who poisoned Sir Geoffrey Tuttle, Bart."

"The bart. was poisoned, was he?"

"You never said a truer word. Personally, I think it was the vicar who did him in. He was known to be interested in strange poisons."

Mr. Mulliner smiled indulgently.

"It was not the vicar," he said. "I happen to have read *The Murglow Manor Mystery*. The guilty man was the plumber."

"What plumber?"

"The one who comes in Chapter Two to mend the shower bath. Sir Geoffrey had wronged his aunt in the year '96, so he fastened a snake in the nozzle of the shower bath with glue; and when Sir Geoffrey turned on the stream the hot water melted the glue. This released the snake, which dropped through one of the holes, bit the baronet in the leg, and disappeared down the waste pipe."

"But that can't be right," said the Draught Stout. "Between Chapter Two and the murder there was an interval of several days."

"The plumber forgot his snake and had to go back for it," explained Mr. Mulliner. "I trust this revelation will prove sedative."

"I feel a new man," said the Draught Stout. "I'd have lain awake worrying about that murder all night."

"I suppose you would. My nephew Cyril was just the same. Nothing in this modern life of ours," said Mr. Mulliner, taking a sip of his hot Scotch and lemon, "is more remarkable than the way in which the mystery novel has gripped the public. Your true enthusiast, deprived of his favorite reading, will stop at nothing in order to get it. He is like a victim of the drug habit when withheld from cocaine. My nephew Cyril —"

"Amazing the things people will leave in trains," said a Small Lager. "Bags . . . umbrellas . . . even stuffed chimpanzees, occasionally, I've been told. I heard a story the other day . . ."

My nephew Cyril (said Mr. Mulliner) had a greater passion for mystery stories than anyone I have ever met. I attribute this to the fact that, like so many interior decorators, he was a fragile, delicate young fellow, extraordinarily vulnerable to any ailment that happened to be going the rounds. Every time he caught mumps or influenza or German measles or the like, he occupied the period of convalescence in reading mystery stories. And, as the appetite grows by what it feeds on, he had become, at the time at which this narrative opens,

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a confirmed addict. Not only did he devour every volume of this type on which he could lay his hands, but he was also to be found at any theatre which was offering the kind of drama where skinny arms come unexpectedly out of the chiffonier and the audience feels a mild surprise if the lights stay on for ten consecutive minutes.

And it was during a performance of *The Grey Vampire* at the St. James's that he found himself sitting next to Amelia Bassett, the girl whom he was to love with all the stored-up fervor of a man who hitherto had been inclined rather to edge away when in the presence of the other sex.

He did not know her name was Amelia Bassett. He had never seen her before. All he knew was that at last he had met his fate, and for the whole of the first act he was pondering the problem of how he was to make her acquaintance.

It was as the lights went up for the first intermission that he was aroused from his thoughts by a sharp pain in the right leg. He was just wondering whether it was gout or sciatica when, glancing down, he perceived that what had happened was that his neighbor, absorbed by the drama, had absent-mindedly collected a handful of his flesh and was twisting it in an ecstasy of excitement.

It seemed to Cyril a good *point d'appui.*

"Excuse me," he said.

The girl turned. Her eyes were glowing, and the tip of her nose still quivered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"My leg," said Cyril. "Might I have it back, if you've finished with it?"

The girl looked down. She started visibly.

"I'm awfully sorry," she gasped.

"Not at all," said Cyril. "Only too glad to have been of assistance."

"I got carried away."

"You are evidently fond of mystery plays."

"I love them."

"So do I. And mystery novels?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Have you read *Blood on the Banisters?*"

"Oh, yes! I thought it was better than *Severed Throats!*"

"So did I," said Cyril. "Much better. Brighter murders, subtler detectives, crisper clues . . . better in every way."

The two twin souls gazed into each other's eyes. There is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature.

"My name is Amelia Bassett," said the girl.

"Mine is Cyril Mulliner. Bassett?" He frowned thoughtfully. "The name seems familiar."

"Perhaps you have heard of my mother. Lady Bassett. She's rather a well-known big-game hunter and explorer. She tramps through jungles and things. She's gone out to the lobby for a smoke. By the way" — she hesitated — "if she finds us talking, will you remember that we met at the Polterwoods'?"

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"I quite understand."

"You see, Mother doesn't like people who talk to me without a formal introduction. And when Mother doesn't like anyone, she is so apt to hit him over the head with some hard instrument."

"I see," said Cyril. "Like the Human Ape in *Gore by the Gallon*."

"Exactly. Tell me," said the girl, changing the subject, "if you were a millionaire, would you rather be stabbed in the back with a paperknife or found dead without a mark on you, staring with blank eyes at some appalling sight?"

Cyril was about to reply when, looking past her, he found himself virtually in the latter position. A woman of extraordinary formidableness had lowered herself into the seat beyond and was scrutinizing him keenly through a tortoise-shell lorgnette. She reminded Cyril of Wallace Beery.

"Friend of yours, Amelia?" she said.

"This is Mr. Mulliner, Mother. We met at the Polterwoods'."

"Ah?" said Lady Bassett.

She inspected Cyril through her lorgnette.

"Mr. Mulliner," she said, "is a little like the chief of the lower Isisi — though, of course, he was darker and had a ring through his nose. A dear, good fellow," she continued reminiscently, "but inclined to become familiar under the influence of trade gin. I shot him in the leg."

"Er — why?" asked Cyril.

"He was not behaving like a gentleman," said Lady Bassett primly.

"After taking your treatment," said Cyril, awed, "I'll bet he could have written a Book of Etiquette."

"I believe he did," said Lady Bassett carelessly. "You must come and call on us some afternoon, Mr. Mulliner. I am in the telephone book. If you are interested in man-eating pumas, I can show you some nice heads."

The curtain rose on Act Two, and Cyril returned to his thoughts. Love, he felt joyously, had come into his life at last. But then so, he had to admit, had Lady Bassett. There is, he reflected, always something. . . .

I will pass lightly over the period of Cyril's wooing. Suffice it to say that his progress was rapid. From the moment he told Amelia he had once met Dorothy L. Sayers, he never looked back. And one afternoon, calling and finding that Lady Bassett was away in the country, he took the girl's hand in his and told his love.

For a while all was well. Amelia's reactions proved satisfactory to a degree. She checked up enthusiastically on his proposition. Falling into his arms, she admitted specifically that he was her Dream Man.

Then came the jarring note.

"But it's no use," she said, her lovely eyes filling with tears. "Mother will never give her consent."

"Why not?" said Cyril, stunned. "What is it she objects to about me?"

"I don't know. But she generally

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alludes to you as 'that pipsqueak.' "

"Pipsqueak?" said Cyril. "What *is* a pipsqueak?"

"I'm not quite sure, but it's something Mother doesn't like very much. It's a pity she ever found out that you are an interior decorator."

"An honorable profession," said Cyril, a little stiffly.

"I know; but what she admires are men who have to do with the great open spaces."

"Well, I also design ornamental gardens."

"Yes," said the girl doubtfully, "but still ——"

"And, dash it," said Cyril indignantly, "this isn't the Victorian Age. All that business of Mother's Consent went out twenty years ago."

"Yes, but no one told Mother."

"It's preposterous!" cried Cyril. "I never heard such rot. Let's just slip off and get married quietly and send her a picture postcard from Venice or somewhere, with a cross and a 'This is our room. Wish you were with us' on it."

The girl shuddered.

"She would be with us," she said. "You don't know Mother. The moment she got that picture postcard, she would come over to wherever we were and put you across her knee and spank you with a hairbrush. I don't think I could ever feel the same towards you if I saw you lying across Mother's knee, being spanked with a hairbrush. It would spoil the honeymoon."

Cyril frowned. But a man who has spent most of his life trying out a series of patent medicines is always an optimist.

"There is only one thing to be done," he said. "I shall see your mother and try to make her listen to reason. Where is she now?"

"She left this morning for a visit to the Winghams in Sussex."

"Excellent! I know the Winghams. In fact, I have a standing invitation to go and stay with them whenever I like. I'll send them a wire and push down this evening. I will oil up to your mother sedulously and try to correct her present unfavorable impression of me. Then, choosing the moment, I will shoot her the news. It may work. It may not work. But at any rate I consider it a fair sporting venture."

"But you are so diffident, Cyril. So shrinking. So retiring and shy. How can you carry through such a task?"

"Love will nerve me."

"Enough, do you think? Remember what Mother is. Wouldn't a good, strong drink be more help?"

Cyril looked doubtful.

"My doctor has always forbidden me alcoholic stimulants. He says they increase the blood pressure."

"Well, when you meet Mother, you will need all the blood pressure you can get. I really do advise you to fuel up a little before you see her."

"Yes," agreed Cyril, nodding thoughtfully. "I think you're right. It shall be as you say. Goodbye, my angel one."

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"Goodbye, Cyril, darling. You will think of me every minute while you're gone?"

"Every single minute. Well, practically every single minute. You see, I have just got Horatio Slingsby's latest book, *Strychnine in the Soup*, and I shall be dipping into that from time to time. But all the rest of the while . . . Have you read it, by the way?"

"Not yet. I had a copy, but Mother took it with her."

"Ah? Well, if I am to catch a train that will get me to Barkley for dinner, I must be going. Goodbye, sweetheart, and never forget that Gilbert Glendale in *The Missing Toe* won the girl he loved in spite of being up against two mysterious stranglers and the entire Black Mustache gang."

He kissed her fondly, and went off to pack.

Barkley Towers, the country seat of Sir Mortimer and Lady Wingham, was two hours from London by rail. Thinking of Amelia and reading the opening chapters of Horatio Slingsby's powerful story, Cyril found the journey passing rapidly. In fact, so preoccupied was he that it was only as the train started to draw out of Barkley Regis station that he realized where he was. He managed to hurl himself onto the platform just in time.

As he had taken the five-seven express, stopping only at Gluebury Peveril, he arrived at Barkley Towers at an hour which enabled him not only to be on hand for dinner but also to take part in the life-giving distribution of cocktails which preceded the meal.

The house party, he perceived on entering the drawing-room, was a small one. Besides Lady Bassett and himself, the only visitors were a nondescript couple of the name of Simpson, and a tall, bronzed, handsome man with flashing eyes who, his hostess informed him in a whispered aside, was Lester Mapledurham (pronounced Mum), the explorer and big-game hunter.

Perhaps it was the oppressive sensation of being in the same room with two explorers and big-game hunters that brought home to Cyril the need for following Amelia's advice as quickly as possible. But probably the mere sight of Lady Bassett alone would have been enough to make him break a life-long abstinence. To her normal resemblance to Wallace Beery she appeared now to have added a distinct suggestion of Victor McLaglen, and the spectacle was sufficient to send Cyril leaping toward the cocktail tray.

After three rapid glasses he felt a better and a braver man. And so lavishly did he irrigate the ensuing dinner with hock, sherry, champagne, old brandy, and port that at the conclusion of the meal he was pleased to find that his diffidence had completely vanished. He rose from the table feeling equal to asking a dozen Lady Bassetts for their consent to marry a dozen daughters.

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In fact, as he confided to the butler, prodding him genially in the ribs as he spoke, if Lady Bassett attempted to put on any dog with *him*, he would know what to do about it. He made no threats, he explained to the butler; he simply stated that he would know what to do about it. The butler said, "Very good, sir. Thank you, sir," and the incident closed.

It had been Cyril's intention — feeling, as he did, in this singularly uplifted and dominant frame of mind — to get hold of Amelia's mother and start oiling up to her immediately after dinner. But, what with falling into a doze in the smoking room and then getting into an argument on theology with one of the underfootmen whom he met in the hall, he did not reach the drawing-room until nearly half-past ten. And he was annoyed, on walking in with a merry cry of "Lady Bassett! Call for Lady Bassett!" on his lips, to discover that she had retired to her room.

Had Cyril's mood been even slightly less elevated, this news might have acted as a check on his enthusiasm. So generous, however, had been Sir Mortimer's hospitality that he merely nodded eleven times, to indicate comprehension, and then, having ascertained that his quarry was roosting in the Blue Room, sped thither with a brief "Tally-ho!"

Arriving at the Blue Room, he banged heartily on the door and breezed in. He found Lady Bassett propped up with pillows. She was smoking a cigar and reading a book. And that book, Cyril saw with intense surprise and resentment, was none other than Horatio Slingsby's *Strychnine in the Soup*.

The spectacle brought him to an abrupt halt.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he cried. "Well, I'm blowed! What do you mean by pinching my book?"

Lady Bassett had lowered her cigar. She now raised her eyebrows.

"What are you doing in my room, Mr. Mulliner?"

"It's a little hard," said Cyril, trembling with self-pity. "I go to enormous expense to buy detective stories, and no sooner is my back turned than people rush about the place sneaking them."

"This book belongs to my daughter Amelia."

"Good old Amelia!" said Cyril cordially. "One of the best."

"I borrowed it to read on the train. Now will you kindly tell me what you are doing in my room, Mr. Mulliner?"

Cyril smote his forehead.

"Of course. I remember now. It all comes back to me. She told me you had taken it. And, what's more, I've suddenly recollected something which clears you completely. I was hustled and bustled at the end of the journey. I sprang to my feet, hurled bags onto the platform — in a word, lost my head. And, like a chump, I went and left my copy of *Strychnine in the Soup* in the train. Well, I can only apologize."

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"You can not only apologize. You can also tell me what you are doing in my room."

"What I am doing in your room?"

"Exactly."

"Ah!" said Cyril, sitting down on the bed. "You may well ask."

"I *have* asked. Three times."

Cyril closed his eyes. For some reason, his mind seemed cloudy and not at its best.

"If you are proposing to go to sleep here, Mr. Mulliner," said Lady Bassett, "tell me, and I shall know what to do about it."

The phrase touched a chord in Cyril's memory. He recollected now his reasons for being where he was. Opening his eyes, he fixed them on her.

"Lady Bassett," he said, "you are, I believe, an explorer."

"I am."

"In the course of your explorations, you have wandered through many a jungle in many a distant land?"

"I have."

"Tell me, Lady Bassett," said Cyril keenly, "while making a pest of yourself to the denizens of those jungles, did you notice one thing? I allude to the fact that Love is everywhere — aye, even in the jungle. Love, independent of bounds and frontiers, of nationality and species, works its spell on every living thing. So that, no matter whether an individual be a Congo native, an American song writer, a jaguar, an armadillo, a bespoke tailor, or a tsetse-tsetse fly, he will infallibly seek his mate. So why shouldn't an interior decorator and designer of ornamental gardens? I put this to you, Lady Bassett."

"Mr. Mulliner," said his roommate, "you are blotto!"

Cyril waved his hand in a spacious gesture, and fell off the bed.

"Blotto I may be," he said, resuming his seat, "but, none the less, argue as you will, you can't get away from the fact that I love your daughter Amelia."

"What did you say?" cried Lady Bassett.

"When?" said Cyril absently, for he had fallen into a daydream and, as far as the intervening blankets would permit, was playing This Little Pig Went to Market with his companion's toes.

"Did I hear you say . . . my daughter Amelia?"

"Gray-eyed girl, medium height, sort of browny red hair," said Cyril, to assist her memory. "Dash it, you *must* know Amelia. She goes everywhere. And let me tell you something, Mrs. — I've forgotten your name. We're going to be married, if I can obtain her foul mother's consent. Speaking as an old friend, what would you say the chances were?"

"Extremely slight."

"Eh?"

"Seeing that I am Amelia's mother . . ."

Cyril blinked, genuinely surprised.

"Why, so you are! I didn't recognize you. Have you been there all the time?"

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"I have."

Suddenly Cyril's gaze hardened. He drew himself up stiffly.

"What are you doing in my bed?" he demanded.

"This is not your bed."

"Then whose is it?"

"Mine."

Cyril shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Well, it all looks very funny to me," he said. "I suppose I must believe your story, but, I repeat, I consider the whole thing odd, and I propose to institute very strict inquiries. I may tell you that I happen to know the ringleaders. I wish you a very hearty good night."

It was perhaps an hour later that Cyril, who had been walking on the terrace in deep thought, repaired once more to the Blue Room in quest of information. Running the details of the recent interview over in his head, he had suddenly discovered that there was a point which had not been satisfactorily cleared up.

"I say," he said.

Lady Bassett looked up from her book, plainly annoyed.

"Have you no bedroom of your own, Mr. Mulliner?"

"Oh, yes," said Cyril. "They've bedded me out in the Moat Room. But there was something I wanted you to tell me."

"Well?"

"Did you say I might or mightn't?"

"Might or mightn't what?"

"Marry Amelia?"

"No. You may not."

"No?"

"No!"

"Oh!" said Cyril. "Well, pip-pip once more."

It was a moody Cyril Mulliner who withdrew to the Moat Room. He now realized the position of affairs. The mother of the girl he loved refused to accept him as an eligible suitor. A dickens of a situation to be in, felt Cyril, somberly unshoeing himself.

Then he brightened a little. His life, he reflected, might be wrecked, but he still had two-thirds of *Strychnine in the Soup* to read.

At the moment when the train reached Barkley Regis station, Cyril had just got to the bit where Detective-Inspector Mould looks through the half-open cellar door and, drawing in his breath with a sharp hissing sound, recoils in horror. It was obviously going to be good. He was just about to proceed to the dressing-table where, he presumed, the footman had placed the book on unpacking his bag, when an icy stream seemed to flow down the center of his spine, and the room and its contents danced before him.

Once more he had remembered that he had left the volume in the train.

He uttered an animal cry and tottered to a chair.

The subject of bereavement is one that has often been treated powerfully by poets, who have run the whole

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gamut of the emotions while laying bare for us the agony of those who have lost parents, wives, children, gazelles, money, fame, dogs, cats, doves, sweethearts, horses, and even collar studs. But no poet has yet treated of the most poignant bereavement of all — that of a man halfway through a detective story who finds himself at bedtime without the book.

Cyril did not care to think of the night that lay before him. Already his brain was lashing itself from side to side like a wounded snake as it sought for some explanation of Inspector Mould's strange behavior. Horatio Slingsby was an author who could be relied on to keep faith with his public. He was not the sort of man to fob the reader off in the next chapter with the statement that what had made Inspector Mould look horrified was the fact that he had suddenly remembered that he had forgotten all about the letter his wife had given him to post. If looking through cellar doors disturbed a Slingsby detective, it was because a dismembered corpse lay there, or at least a severed hand.

A soft moan, as of something in torment, escaped Cyril. What to do? What to do? Even a makeshift substitute for *Strychnine in the Soup* was beyond his reach. He knew so well what he would find if he went to the library in search of something to read. Sir Mortimer Wingham was heavy and country-squirish. His wife affected strange religions. Their literature was in keeping with their tastes. In the library there would be books on Ba-ha-ism, volumes in old leather of the *Rural Encyclopædia*, *My Two Years in Sunny Ceylon*, by the Rev. Orlo Waterbury . . . but of anything that would interest Scotland Yard, of anything with a bit of blood in it and a corpse or two into which a fellow could get his teeth, not a trace.

What, then, coming right back to it, to do?

And suddenly, as if in answer to the question, came the solution. Electrified, he saw the way out.

The hour was now well advanced. By this time Lady Bassett must surely be asleep. *Strychnine in the Soup* would be lying on the table beside her bed. All he had to do was to creep in and grab it.

The more he considered the idea, the better it looked. It was not as if he did not know the way to Lady Bassett's room or the topography of it when he got there. It seemed to him as if most of his later life had been spent in Lady Bassett's room. He could find his way about it with his eyes shut.

He hesitated no longer. Donning a dressing-gown, he left his room and hurried along the passage.

Pushing open the door of the Blue Room and closing it softly behind him, Cyril stood for a moment full of all those emotions which come to a man revisiting some long-familiar spot. There the dear old room was, just the same as ever. How it all came back to him! The place was in darkness, but

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that did not deter him. He knew where the bed-table was, and he made for it with stealthy steps.

In the manner in which Cyril Mulliner advanced towards the bed-table there was much which would have reminded Lady Basset, had she been an eye-witness, of the furtive prowl of the Lesser Iguanodon tracking its prey. In only one respect did Cyril and this creature of the wild differ in their technique. Iguanodons — and this applies not only to the Lesser but to the Larger Iguanodon — seldom, if ever, trip over cords on the floor and bring the lamps to which they are attached crashing to the ground like a ton of bricks.

Cyril did. Scarcely had he snatched up the book and placed it in the pocket of his dressing-gown, when his foot became entangled in the trailing cord and the lamp on the table leaped nimbly into the air and, to the accompaniment of a sound not unlike that made by a hundred plates coming apart simultaneously in the hands of a hundred scullery maids, nose-dived to the floor and became a total loss.

At the same moment, Lady Bassett, who had been chasing a bat out of the window, stepped in from the balcony and switched on the lights.

To say that Cyril Mulliner was taken aback would be to understate the facts. Nothing like this recent misadventure had happened to him since his eleventh year, when, going surreptitiously to his mother's cupboard for jam, he had jerked three shelves down on his head, containing milk, butter, homemade preserves, pickles, cheese, eggs, cakes, and potted meat. His feelings on the present occasion closely paralleled that boyhood thrill.

Lady Bassett also appeared somewhat discomposed.

"You!" she said.

Cyril nodded, endeavoring the while to smile in a reassuring manner.

"Hullo!" he said.

His hostess' manner was now one of unmistakable displeasure.

"Am I not to have a moment of privacy, Mr. Mulliner?" she asked severely. "I am, I trust, a broad-minded woman, but I cannot approve of this idea of communal bedrooms."

Cyril made an effort to be conciliatory.

"I do keep coming in, don't I?" he said.

"You do," agreed Lady Bassett. "Sir Mortimer informed me, on learning that I had been given this room, that it was supposed to be haunted. Had I known that it was haunted by you, Mr. Mulliner, I should have packed up and gone to the local inn."

Cyril bowed his head. The censure, he could not but feel, was deserved.

"I admit," he said, "that my conduct has been open to criticism. In extenuation, I can but plead my great love. This is no idle social call, Lady Bassett. I looked in because I wished to take up again this matter of my marrying your daughter Amelia. You say I can't. Why can't I? Answer me that, Lady Bassett."

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"I have other views for Amelia," said Lady Bassett stiffly. "When my daughter gets married it will not be to a spineless, invertebrate product of our modern hot-house civilization, but to a strong, upstanding, keen-eyed, two-fisted he-man of the open spaces. I have no wish to hurt your feelings, Mr. Mulliner," she continued, more kindly, "but you must admit that you are, when all is said and done, a pipsqueak."

"I deny it," cried Cyril warmly. "I don't even know what a pipsqueak is."

"A pipsqueak is a man who has never seen the sun rise beyond the reaches of the Lower Zambezi; who would not know what to do if faced by a charging rhinoceros. What, pray, would you do if faced by a charging rhinoceros, Mr. Mulliner?"

"I am not likely," said Cyril, "to move in the same social circles as charging rhinoceri."

"Or take another simple case, such as happens every day. Suppose you are crossing a rude bridge over a stream in Equatorial Africa. You have been thinking of a hundred trifles and are in a reverie. From this you wake to discover that in the branches overhead a python is extending its fangs towards you. At the same time, you observe that at one end of the bridge is a crouching puma; at the other are two head hunters — call them Pat and Mike — with poisoned blowpipes to their lips. Below, half-hidden in the stream, is an alligator. What would you do?"

Cyril weighed the point.

"I should feel embarrassed," he had to admit. "I shouldn't know where to look."

Lady Bassett laughed an amused, scornful little laugh.

"Precisely. Such a situation would not, however, disturb Lester Mapledurham."

"Lester Mapledurham!"

"The man who is to marry my daughter Amelia. He asked me for her hand shortly after dinner."

Cyril reeled. The blow, falling so suddenly and unexpectedly, had made him feel boneless. And yet, he felt, he might have expected this. These explorers and big-game hunters stick together.

"In a situation such as I have outlined, Lester Mapledurham would simply drop from the bridge, wait till the alligator made its rush, insert a stout stick between its jaws, and then hit it in the eye with a spear, being careful to avoid its lashing tail. He would then drift downstream and land at some safer spot. That is the type of man I wish for a son-in-law."

Cyril left the room without a word. Not even the fact that he now had *Strychnine in the Soup* in his possession could cheer his mood of unrelieved blackness. Back in his room, he tossed the book moodily onto the bed and began to pace the floor. And he had scarcely completed two laps when the door opened.

For an instant, when he heard the click of the latch, Cyril supposed that his visitor must be Lady Bassett,

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who, having put two and two together on discovering her loss, had come to demand her property back. And he cursed the rashness which had led him to fling it so carelessly upon the bed, in full view.

But it was not Lady Bassett. The intruder was Lester Mapledurham. Clad in a suit of pajamas which in their general color scheme reminded Cyril of a boudoir he had recently decorated for a society poetess, he stood with folded arms, his keen eyes fixed menacingly on the young man.

"Give me those jewels!" said Lester Mapledurham.

Cyril was at a loss.

"Jewels?"

"Jewels!"

"What jewels?"

Lester Mapledurham tossed his head impatiently.

"I don't know what jewels. They may be the Wingham Pearls or the Bassett Diamonds or the Simpson Sapphires. I'm not sure which room it was I saw you coming out of."

Cyril began to understand.

"Oh, did you see me coming out of a room?"

"I did. I heard a crash and, when I looked out, you were hurrying along the corridor."

"I can explain everything," said Cyril. "I had just been having a chat with Lady Bassett on a personal matter. Nothing to do with diamonds."

"You're sure?" said Mapledurham.

"Oh, rather," said Cyril. "We talked about rhinoceri and pythons and her daughter Amelia and alligators and all that sort of thing, and then I came away."

Lester Mapledurham seemed only half-convinced.

"H'm!" he said. "Well, if anything is missing in the morning, I shall know what to do about it." His eye fell on the bed. "Hullo!" he went on, with sudden animation. "Slingsby's latest? Well, well! I've been wanting to get hold of this. I hear it's good. The Leeds *Mercury* says: 'These gripping pages . . .'"

He turned to the door, and with a hideous pang of agony Cyril perceived that it was plainly his intention to take the book with him. It was swinging lightly from a bronzed hand about the size of a medium ham.

"Here!" he cried, vehemently.

Lester Mapledurham turned.

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing," said Cyril. "Just good night."

He flung himself face downwards on the bed as the door closed, cursing himself for the craven cowardice which had kept him from snatching the book from the explorer. There had been a moment when he had almost nerved himself to the deed, but it was followed by another moment in which he had caught the other's eye. And it was as if he had found himself exchanging glances with Lady Bassett's charging rhinoceros.

And now, thanks to this pusillanimity, he was once more *Strychnine in the Soup*-less.

How long Cyril lay there, a prey

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to the gloomiest thoughts, he could not have said. He was aroused from his meditations by the sound of the door opening again.

Lady Bassett stood before him. It was plain that she was deeply moved. In addition to resembling Wallace Beery and Victor McLaglen, she now had a distinct look of George Bancroft.

She pointed a quivering finger at Cyril.

"You hound!" she cried. "Give me that book!"

Cyril maintained his poise with a strong effort.

"What book?"

"The book you sneaked out of my room."

"Has someone sneaked a book out of your room?" Cyril struck his forehead. "Great heavens!" he cried.

"Mr. Mulliner," said Lady Bassett coldly, "more book and less gibbering!"

Cyril raised a hand.

"I know who's got your book. Lester Mapledurham!"

"Don't be absurd."

"He has, I tell you. As I was on my way to your room just now, I saw him coming out, carrying something in a furtive manner. I remember wondering a bit at the time. He's in the Clock Room. If we pop along there now, we shall just catch him red-handed."

Lady Bassett reflected.

"It is impossible," she said at length. "He is incapable of such an act. Lester Mapledurham is a man who once killed a lion with a sardine opener."

"The very worst sort," said Cyril. "Ask anyone."

"And he is engaged to my daughter." Lady Bassett paused. "Well, he won't be long, if I find that what you say is true. Come, Mr. Mulliner!"

Together the two passed down the silent passage. At the door of the Clock Room they paused. A light streamed from beneath it. Cyril pointed silently to this sinister evidence of reading in bed, and noted that his companion stiffened and said something to herself in an undertone in what appeared to be some sort of native dialect.

The next moment she had flung the door open and, with a spring like that of a crouching zebu, had leaped to the bed and wrenched the book from Lester Mapledurham's hands.

"So!" said Lady Bassett.

"So!" said Cyril, feeling that he could not do better than follow the lead of such a woman.

"Hullo!" said Lester Mapledurham. "Something the matter?"

"So it was you who stole my book!"

"Your book?" said Lester Mapledurham. "I borrowed this from Mr. Mulliner there."

"A likely story!" said Cyril. "Lady Bassett is aware that I left my copy of *Strychnine in the Soup* in the train."

"Certainly," said Lady Bassett. "It's no use talking, young man, I have caught you with the goods. And let me tell you one thing that may be of interest. If you think that, after a

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dastardly act like this, you are going to marry Amelia, forget it!"

"Wipe it right out of your mind," said Cyril.

"But listen ——"

"I will not listen. Come, Mr. Mulliner."

She left the room, followed by Cyril.

"A merciful escape," said Cyril.

"For whom?"

"For Amelia. My gosh, think of her tied to a man like that. Must be a relief to you to feel that she's going to marry a respectable interior decorator."

Lady Bassett halted. They were standing outside the Moat Room now. She looked at Cyril, her eyebrows raised.

"Are you under the impression, Mr. Mulliner," she said, "that, on the strength of what has happened, I intend to accept you as a son-in-law?"

"Don't you?"

"Certainly not."

Something inside Cyril seemed to snap. Recklessness descended upon him. He became for a space a thing of courage and fire, like the African leopard in the mating season.

"Oh!" he said.

And, deftly whisking *Strychnine in the Soup* from his companion's hand, he darted into his room, banged the door, and bolted it.

"Mr. Mulliner!"

It was Lady Bassett's voice, coming pleadingly through the woodwork. It was plain that she was shaken to the core, and Cyril smiled sardonically. He was in a position to dictate terms.

"Give me that book!"

"Certainly not," said Cyril. "I intend to read it myself. I hear good reports of it on every side. The Peebles *Intelligencer* says: 'Vigorous and absorbing.' "

A low wail from the other side of the door answered him.

"Of course," said Cyril, suggestively, "if it were my future mother-in-law who was speaking, her word would naturally be law."

There was a silence outside.

"Very well," said Lady Bassett.

"I may marry Amelia?"

"You may."

Cyril unbolted the door.

"Come — Mother," he said, in a soft, kindly voice. "We will read it together, down in the library."

Lady Bassett was still shaken.

"I hope I have acted for the best," she said.

"You have," said Cyril.

"You will make Amelia a good husband?"

"Grade A," Cyril assured her.

"Well, even if you don't," said Lady Bassett resignedly, "I can't go to bed without that book. I had just got to the bit where Inspector Mould is trapped in the underground den of the Faceless Fiend."

Cyril quivered.

"*Is* there a Faceless Fiend?" he cried.

"There are two Faceless Fiends," said Lady Bassett.

"My gosh!" said Cyril. "Let's hurry."

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It was Winston Churchill who once said, about an entirely different matter: "It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

At the proper point in the story which follows, your Editors will stop to ask you: "How do you account for the strange happenings in Frank Gruber's tale of an ancient gold cup?" And perhaps you will pause in your reading and consider the implications of Mr. Gruber's strange story . . .

THE GOLD CUP

by FRANK GRUBER

THE CUP WAS MADE OF GOLD, NO question about that. It was about four inches tall and weighed close to a pound. I didn't know of any other metal that would have made the cup weigh as much, even though the thing didn't look like gold. But I guess that was because it was so old.

It looked as if it had been buried in the ground for a long time, and was pretty battered and dented. It wasn't a big haul. We'd be lucky to get three hundred for it from Opdyke. He'd make maybe two hundred profit on it, by melting it down and selling it to the government as old gold.

We'd turned in pretty late the night before and it was almost noon before we got up. I dug the cup out from under the bed and was looking it over and thinking what a fool I was for taking such chances for a measly hundred and fifty — my share.

Benny, on the other hand, was pretty chipper. He wasn't used to big money and all he'd done to earn his share was keep a lookout outside the place, while I did the dirty work.

"Not bad, Jim," he cackled. "It couldda been more, but this ain't bad at all."

I looked around the room I was sharing with Benny. It was about eight feet by ten and contained a bed with springs that sagged almost to the floor, two chairs, a cheap dresser, and a row of nails in the wall that served as a clothes closet. Benny paid four dollars a week for the room. The one I'd had up the river — with bars on the door and window — had been just as cheerful.

I said to Benny: "We'll get some clothes and some good food and have a couple of parties. We'll be broke in a week. Then what?"

"Then we'll crack another safe," he replied promptly.

That was when the knock came on the door. I never saw a man change color as quickly as Benny did. One minute he'd been cocky as a

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Jungle Shawl fighting rooster, the next his face looked like sour dough.

I took a couple of quick steps toward Benny. "Thought you said no one knew where you lived?"

Benny's teeth chattered as he shook his head. "They — they don't! You s'pose it's — the cops?"

The knock on the door was repeated, two quick knocks, then three spaced apart.

Benny called out: "Who is it?"

A quiet sort of voice answered. A man's voice. "Open up, I want to talk to you."

Benny wasn't shivering now; he was shaking like a young sapling in a Kansas twister. For my own part I took a quick look out the window. I saw that it opened on a dead-air shaft. There was no retreat that way, and I cursed Benny for being such a fool as to rent a room without a hole by which we could escape.

Well, there was nothing to do but open the door. I slipped back the bolt and jerked open the door. I expected a cop. Maybe he was a cop. But he didn't look like one.

He was tall, about six feet, well-built, but still looked kind of lean. He was in his early thirties and rather dark complexioned.

I hardly took in his features though, because of his eyes. They were large and dark and there was an expression in them that I can't describe exactly — except that when I looked into them I was — well, scared.

He was smiling.

"May I come in?"

I moved back into the room and shot a quick look toward the bed. Benny had had sense enough to throw a blanket over the gold cup. But when I looked back at the stranger his eyes were on the bed. He'd closed the door behind him.

He said: "You'll have to take it back."

He couldn't *see* the gold cup; for that matter he couldn't have known that Benny and me were the ones who stole it.

I began edging around him, so that he was partly between Benny and myself. I said: "What're you talking about? Take what back?"

He shook his head and smiled. "The object you got last night. You'll have to take it back to Alfred Halleck."

Benny chirped up, then. He said: "Sure," and went to the bed. He stooped over, put his hand under a pillow, and came up with an automatic. I blinked. I hadn't known that Benny had a rod.

He pointed it at the stranger and snapped: "Up with 'em, copper!"

I was looking at the stranger. He didn't seem worried. He was still smiling, only . . . the smile was a kind of sad one.

"I'm sorry," the stranger said, "you'll have to take it back."

Benny sneered. "There's some rope in the top drawer, Jim. Tie his hands. My room rent's up today, anyway. We'll just leave him here."

I got the rope, but I wasn't feeling so good. The gun in Benny's hand —

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I've done a lot of things in my time; I've been up the river, but I never carried a gun. I don't believe in guns. Sure, I'm a safe-cracker — a burglar. But I take my chances. I try not to get caught, but if I am — that's my hard luck. I take the rap. But I don't ever want a murder rap. All the fellows I ever knew who carried guns wound up with murder raps.

The stranger put his hands behind his back. I wound the rope around his wrists, then he stretched out on the bed and I finished up by tying his feet. I did a good job of it. I wanted enough time to take the cup to Opdyke, get my split, and leave. I wanted no more of Benny.

Benny got the cup from under the blanket, wrapped it in a towel, then rolled the whole thing inside an old newspaper and tied a piece of string around it.

We were ready to leave the room when the stranger spoke again. He said: "Take it back. Take it back, Benny Potter and Jim Vedder."

I didn't think about that until we were outside of Benny's rooming house. Then it struck me. Aside from Benny, no one knew my name. I'd only got out two days ago. I'd come straight to Benny's room and had been out of it only once — the night before when we took the trip up to Fox Meadow in Scarsdale and cracked the safe.

Benny lived on Christopher Street. We walked east to Sixth Avenue, then turned north. After a block or two Benny said, "Let's stop in here and get a glass of beer."

I was willing. My throat was kind of dry. The saloon didn't look like much, but beer's beer no matter where you get it. We went in. It was the middle of the morning and the place was deserted except for the bartender and one customer who stood in front of the bar, with his back toward us.

"Two beers," Benny said.

Then the man at the bar turned around. It was the stranger. The man we'd left in Benny's room.

He looked right at me and this time he wasn't smiling. The temperature of the café seemed suddenly to get ten degrees colder.

He said: "You'll have to take it back."

I was pretty shocked by the sight of him, but Benny looked as if he was going to faint.

I backed to the door and that broke the spell on Benny. He gave a hoarse yell, whipped out the automatic and rushed backwards, like a prizefighter backing away. He was in such a hurry he missed the door and banged against the wall.

He made it the second time and I was only one jump behind him. Out on Sixth Avenue we rushed to the next corner, which was 11th Street, turned right, and didn't stop until we were almost up to Fifth. We stopped then just because we were out of breath. We both looked back, but the stranger wasn't in sight.

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"Cripes," panted Benny, "how did he get loose from those ropes and beat us to that saloon?"

"He couldn't have done it," I told Benny. "We went there straight from your room, by the shortest way. And, anyway . . . how did he know we were going to turn into *that* saloon? We didn't know it ourselves until we saw the sign."

Benny's eyes almost popped out of his head. "That's right!" he gasped. "He couldn't have known we'd go in there — unless he guessed!"

I didn't say a word. I was still feeling cold, despite the long run I'd just had, and I don't think the short hairs on my hackle had gone down. Up the street a little way was a delicatessen shop, with a newspaper stand in front of it. I plunked down a few pennies and picked up a paper.

It was on page three, a two-column story, with a picture of the cup in one column. The heading over the article was: *Historical Relic Stolen.* Boiled down, the story was to the effect that burglars had cracked the safe of Alfred D. Halleck, noted archeologist, and stolen a gold cup that Halleck had discovered on one of his excavations some three years ago. The piece also told of Halleck having exhibited the gold cup at the New York World's Fair.

I handed the newspaper to Benny. He glanced at the article, but didn't take the trouble to read through it. "That's the good thing about gold," he said. "You can melt it down."

"We're not melting it down," I told Benny. "We're taking it back."

Benny stared at me. "Are you crazy? After the trouble we went to to get it? Hey, snap out of it. Opdyke lives over here on Fourth Avenue. He'll haggle around a little, but he'll to come across with three hundred."

"The cup goes back to Fox Meadow," I told Benny. "It's — an antique. It's worth a lot more than three hundred."

"All the more reason then!" Benny cried. "We'll show this newspaper story to Opdyke — kick the price up on him."

All of a sudden I got mad. I grabbed Benny's arm and twisted him around. "You fool, don't you see? Halleck values this cup. It's worth a lot to him — a lot more than three hundred. All right, we'll sell it back to him!"

Benny's eyes lit up. "Say, that's an idea. Maybe he'll go a grand for it. He's got the dough. That place of his cost a lot. We'll hold him up for a grand. Come on, we'll grab a train out to Scarsdale and get it over with. We'll break in on him and make him come across with the dough, before we turn over the cup. Otherwise he'll call the cops. . . ."

We took a bus on Fifth Avenue and rode up to Forty-second, then walked across to Grand Central. Inside we bought two one-way tickets to Scarsdale and looked up the train schedule. One was listed to leave in twelve minutes. I didn't like the idea of waiting around in the waiting room, so I gave Benny the high-sign

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and headed for the washroom, on the lower level.

To kill time we got up on a couple of high seats to get our shoes shined. Benny got his shined first, then the bootblack started on mine. It was timing things pretty close. When he finished with me, it was two minutes to train time. I paid for the shines and headed for the door. It opened before I got to it and the stranger came in.

Benny let go altogether this time. He yelled to high heaven and he got so scared he dropped the cup.

Me, I just stood and stared at the tall man. I guess I'd still be standing there looking at him, if he hadn't stooped and picked up the package. He held it out, smiled, and said:

"Take it back, Jim Vedder."

He left me holding it, turned, and walked out. Benny recovered then. "What — what do you make of that?"

I said: "We're taking it back, Benny. Come on!"

The gateman was just about to close the gate when we got to it. I grabbed another newspaper from a stand next to the door, threw down a nickel, and scooted inside. We caught the last car of the train.

We got seats in the rear and I spread out the newspaper. It was the noon edition of an evening paper. The story was still on the front page. But there were some new angles to it. First of all, Alfred D. Halleck was offering a reward of $1,500 for the safe return of the gold cup — and *No Questions Asked.*

In an adjoining column was an interview with Halleck, written up by one of the paper's reporters. Halleck was pretty upset by what had happened. He was offering a reward, he said, but he didn't really expect to get the gold cup back. That was because he didn't think that ordinary burglars had blown his safe. He suspected the job had been done, or hired done, by a certain wealthy collector of *objets d'art* who'd been bothering him for the last three years, trying to make Halleck sell him the gold cup. The collector, Halleck said, had offered him $50,000 for the cup and when he'd still refused to sell it, the collector threatened to steal it.

Halleck wouldn't tell the reporter the collector's name, but the reporter was a smart lad. He'd checked up back in the office and had gone to ask a Mr. August Messerschmidt, who lived on Park Avenue in New York, if he had any comment to make. Mr. Messerschmidt was a well-known collector of *objets d'art.* The reporter didn't come right out and say that Messerschmidt was the man who'd made the offer and threat to Halleck, but any kid could figure out the answer. Anyway, Messerschmidt had thrown the reporter out on his ear.

Benny was reading over my shoulder. When I put down the paper he took it from me and ripped out the page. He began folding it up.

I said: "What're you going to do?"

He didn't answer right away. The conductor had come along, collected our tickets and put a couple of slips

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in the slot on the back of the seat ahead of us. When he had gone away, Benny said:

"This Messerschmidt's a crook. He wants that cup any way he can get it. I've heard of guys like him. There's a fella in Philadelphia, collects pictures. He's got a million dollars' worth of them and no one ever sees them but himself, because half of them have been swiped. This Messerschmidt'll go twenty-five g's. We'll get off at 125th Street Station."

I wondered why I'd ever tied up with Benny Potter. With what had happened to us in the last hour . . . I said to him: "No, we're going to Scarsdale. The cup goes back to Halleck."

"Are you crazy?" Benny yelped. "The most he'd give is fifteen hundred and the chances are four in five he won't give us anything but a houseful of cops. We're not going anywhere near Fox Meadow. We're getting off at the first stop and taking this to Park Avenue. That guy Messerschmidt's a bigger crook than we are. That's why he'll come across. . . . Gimme the cup!"

He reached for it and I shifted it to my left arm, against the window. With my right hand I slapped down his reaching paw.

He gave me a dirty look, then slumped down in his seat. He didn't say a word until the train pulled into the 125th Street Station. Then he suddenly got up. "All right, Jim, if that's the way you want it —"

His hand went to his hip and came back with the automatic. I'd forgot all about his having it.

I looked into his eyes and knew that he was going to take the cup from me if he had to shoot to get it. But I knew, too, that I wasn't going to give it to him.

I shook my head. "You can't, Benny. You . . ." I broke off and made a sudden dive for him. Even as I moved, I knew I couldn't make it. Benny's finger tightened on that automatic.

It thundered. But I didn't feel any shock or pain. I landed in the aisle on my hands and knees, twisted around, and looked up at the stranger!

Benny was looking at him, too. And all of a sudden he yelled and headed for the door.

The train was already moving, the door was closed, but Benny tore it open. I climbed to my feet, started back for Benny, and then I heard a scream that I'll hear to my dying day.

There was a lot of commotion, then. People shouted, the conductor pulled the cord, and the train stopped.

Benny . . . Benny was dead.

The 125th Street Station is in the heart of Harlem, it's up in the air like an elevated, and the station platform is about three feet above the tracks. When Benny jumped, the train was already beyond the platform. Benny had landed on the ties, fallen forward onto the next track . . . just as another train pulled in on that track.

I didn't wait. There were half a dozen policemen around and questions were going to be asked — ques-

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tions I didn't want to answer. I took a subway train back to Grand Central, bought another ticket for Scarsdale, and took the first train.

In Scarsdale I took a taxi to Alfred Halleck's house in Fox Meadow.

I didn't ring the bell. I didn't have to, because the door opened before I got to it. It was opened by the tall, dark man. I wasn't surprised. Not by then. In fact, I would have been surprised if it had been anyone else.

He smiled at me, in a pleased sort of way, and said: "I'm glad you brought it back. Will you come in?"

He led the way to a library, opened the door for me, and said: "Mr. Halleck!"

Halleck sitting behind a teakwood desk, looked up at me, said: "Yes?"

I walked across the room and put the package on the desk in front of him. "I brought back the gold cup."

His eyes popped wide open and he grabbed the package and tore the newspaper from about it. When he stripped off the towel and saw the cup, perspiration came to his forehead. He said: "Thank God!"

Then he looked at me. "Do you mind telling me . . . I know, I said no questions asked and this is not going to go any further . . . did you steal it, or are you returning this for someone?"

I told him. "I stole it. I'm sorry. You can call the police."

He looked at me in a funny sort of a way. "The police?" he repeated. "I'm not going to call them. I'm too glad to get this back. And here . . ." He opened a drawer and pulled out a thick stack of bills. "Here's the reward — fifteen hundred dollars."

I shook my head. "No, I don't want any reward. Not money. But you can do something. Tell me . . . who is the man who brought me into this room?"

He blinked. "No one brought you. You came in yourself."

"But there was a man with me. He — he opened the door and brought me to the room. He called your name."

"You said my name," Halleck replied. "And you came in by yourself. There isn't another man in the house. Besides ourselves there's only the cook in the kitchen."

I returned the gold cup six months ago. Alfred Halleck gave me a job. I'm a sort of handyman around his place, and I'm going with Mr. Halleck on his next trip to Asia. He knows all about me.

All except what I did the day after I returned the gold cup. I wanted to get some things off my mind and I took the train back to Grand Central. In the washroom on the lower level I went up to the bootblack. Before I could say anything he grabbed up a couple of brushes and backed away.

"Don't you bother me, Mister, or I'll call the police!" he yelled.

I shook my head and put a dollar bill on one of the seats. Then I took three steps away from it. "That dollar's yours," I told him, "if you tell me exactly what you saw here yesterday when I had my shoes shined."

The bootblack looked at the dollar,

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and then at me. He shook his head, mumbled in his throat, then said: "Well, sir, you and the gent'man with you had a couple drinks too many, I guess. You started for the door, then all of a sudden you bust out like you'd seen a ghost."

I nodded. "You're sure there wasn't another man here at the time?"

The bootblack took another step back. "No, sir."

I went out, took the Fifth Avenue bus and rode down to the Village, then walked to the cafe on Sixth Avenue.

The bartender recognized me right away and reached for a bung-starter. "Get out of here! I don't want no hop-heads in my place."

"I'm sorry," I said, "but would you mind telling me exactly what happened here yesterday?"

His eyes rolled, but he said, "I'll tell you. You and some other dope came in here, ordered a couple of beers, then started cutting up, pretending there was someone else here too. That partner of yours acted like a wild man. . . ."

"I guess he did. But you're *sure* there wasn't anybody else in here at the time — a tall, dark man?"

"There wasn't no one else in here."

I spent the rest of the day and evening at the Public Library. . . .

EDITORS' QUERY: *How do you account for the strange happenings in this story? Pause for a few moments, before finishing the story, and consider the unusual implications of Mr. Gruber's tale of an ancient gold cup . . .*

As I say, I spent the rest of the day at the Public Library. First, I dug up some old newspapers from the time of the World's Fair, and before. I read all the arguments about the authenticity of Professor Halleck's gold cup. There was no question that he had found the cup in Asia Minor, near a place called Antioch, which had been the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for a hundred years or so. Halleck claimed the cup dated back to the first century, A.D., but other archeologists insisted that the cup was of more recent origin. The issue was debated for many months and took up a lot of newsprint.

Then I came across, in an encyclopedia, several pages of pictures — reproductions of old religious paintings. One of the pictures was supposed to go back to the first century, having been found in the Catacombs near Rome. It showed Christ and his Disciples at the Last Supper, and on the table I clearly saw Christ's wine cup — the Golden Chalice, the Holy Grail.

They're still arguing about Professor Halleck's gold cup, but I'm not. I know. And I'm sure there's no mistake.

You see, the stranger didn't have a beard, but with a beard he would have looked very much like the tall, dark-complexioned man in the first-century religious painting. . . .

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Another story by that zestful English tale-spinner, L. J. Beeston . . . Those of you who read Mr. Beeston's previous stories, "The Pipe" and "Volturio Investigates," will know what to expect — or will you? No, on second consideration, this third story is altogether different. It is not a tale of ingenious deduction, like "The Pipe"; nor a tale of pure suspense, like "Volturio Investigates." Rather, it is a real oldtime thriller — a tale of murder, danger, and unrelieved melodrama.

The author has written nearly one thousand short stories. Picture him in a small room — the smaller the better, he tells us — gazing at the ceiling and reaching out for plots, plots, and more plots; and catching them with the long tentacles of his mind — intangible webs, to quote the author, floating in the silence of that small room . . .

THE SENSATION CLUB

by L. J. BEESTON

"LANDLORD," SAID GARMAN, FINISHing his bottle of claret, "I believe that I passed in my car, two miles north of here, that lonely house on a hill-top where an old man was brutally murdered a week ago."

The landlord of *The Nine Bells*, who had looked in to see if his visitor was enjoying his dinner, set his face to a grave expression.

"You mean the crime at Windy Oaks?" said he. "Yes, you would pass the place, coming that way. 'Twas terrible. Mr. Tracer was well known about here, sir. They found him in his bedroom one morning, cruelly battered, dead as that salmon in the glass case on the wall."

"A forceful simile," murmured the middle-aged, robustly-built guest, feeling for a cigar. "A shocking affair, and still not cleared up, you say?"

"Nothin' material done. All we hear is that the police are looking for a man in a brown suit: a man between thirty and forty, with black hair. That don't amount to much — lacking further particulars. Such a man was seen near the house on the night of the murder."

"Well, I hope they get him," said Garman, rising.

"Strange enough," went on the landlord of the inn, rubbing his blue chin up the wrong way, "the very last time I saw Mr. Tracer was in this 'ouse, taking his dinner in this very room. A square-built man, sir, with a blue reefer-cut coat, brown beard turning to yellow, and gold spectacles. I little thought ——"

"Well, I must be off," interrupted Garman, preparing to pay. "I shall have to push my little car along to

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get to town by nine o'clock. And there's a moaning sou'-west wind about that may mean rain."

Garman left the cosy inn a minute later. Its cheerful light showed his car waiting by the roadside. Garman was driving it himself. After bestowing a tip or two he got in, buttoned up well, and glided off into the absolutely dark night. There was no moon, the stars were obscured, and the only sound to be heard was the whining plaint of the wind to the telegraph wires.

Garman had scarcely got going, and *The Nine Bells* was about fifty yards behind, when a figure leaped into the middle of the road and waved its arms for him to stop. The car carried good headlights for its size, and in the searching glare Garman, as he applied his brakes, saw that the interrupter of his progress was a man of about thirty-seven, who was wearing a brown suit.

A voice, husky with entreaty, called to him — "If you are going to London, sir, or only a part of the way, I beg of you to give me a lift."

The car came to a stop. The man's face looked deathly white in the headlights' glare.

Garman was a man of swift consideration. He fixed a penetrative gaze upon the man, and he reflected. He did not like that brown suit and those thirty-seven years. But Garman was a man without fear, and very well able to take care of himself. Also he never jumped to a conclusion.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired.

"I am stranded here," answered the other, with beseeching. "No train stops here for hours, and I want to get to London at the earliest moment. I cannot say how grateful I should be ——"

"All right, get in," invited Garman, curtly.

With a hurried outburst of thanks the stranger climbed into the car and took the only other seat — on Garman's left.

Away hummed the automobile, skimming beautifully to the crest of a long ascent. The white road streamed under the hood; sheer pace gave a whistle to the wind, and a raw, chilling breath.

Said Garman to himself as he gripped the wheel: "Now I wonder who the devil this fellow is? He is very anxious to get away from here, but I wouldn't think anything of that if he was wearing a different-colored coat. Still, the situation is not without interest. If he tries any hanky-panky trick on me I shall break his jaw. Of course, he may not be *that* fellow. He wouldn't be found so near the spot. But if he is ——"

Garman suddenly checked the conjecture. A soft whistle crept to his lips. A startling idea had darted like an electric current through his mind. He muttered to himself: "In that case — in that case, what would they say to it at the Club? Why — why — good heavens, what a point to score!"

So strange and powerful was the idea that had presented itself to Garman that it imparted an almost

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literal flash to his eyes. In the grip of it he stared straight ahead, thinking rapidly, guiding the car subconsciously. He did not see the uneasy glances which his companion kept bestowing upon him.

After they had covered seven miles Garman decided to act. His first move was to bring the car to a standstill. They were then in a partly-sunken road, heavy and black with mud, and the twisted roots of trees came out on the bank like monstrous serpents.

"Now, then, answer short and sharp!" commanded Garman. "Who are you?"

The other winced at the demand, and put out a hand towards the door. "You take a strange tone with me," he replied.

"I do. And I have a reason. You are the man looked for in the Tracer murder."

"That's an infernal lie," was the stammered response.

"Is it?" snarled Garman, grimly. "It is up to you to prove your word. You will not object?"

"What do you mean?"

"That we stop at the next police station, where you can answer a few questions."

"You can stop at all of them if you choose," sneered the other.

"One will be enough."

As he spoke, Garman restarted the car; but before it had traveled a yard his companion vaulted clean over the side of it. Garman lost a second or two, then was after him. The pursuit was of brief duration, for suddenly the stranger stopped as if a pistol ball had pierced his heart.

"Oh, my God! He's there — again — there!" he cried in a voice hoarse and broken by terror.

A thrill quivered over even Garman's well-strung nerves. He stared intently in the direction to which the other pointed. In the dark wall of the night all he could perceive — and that very faintly — was a gnarled oak tree with its writhing limbs, on which the unfallen brown and withered leaves made a husky sound in the wind.

"Who's there? What the devil do you mean?" cried Garman, as he grasped the fugitive by the shoulder.

"*He!*" was the gasped response. "I saw the flash of his gold spectacles. There — there! He's got on the same reefer coat! He has taken his hands from his pockets! Keep him off! He isn't dead! Can't be! I have seen him like that twice since. He's alive! Keep him away!"

The voice rose almost to a scream, sending an icy shiver the length of Garman's spine. With a single action he spun the man round and pushed him by main strength into the car, where he collapsed. Garman started again, and he flung a queer and apprehensive glance towards the oak tree as he passed it.

The car covered several miles before either man spoke. Presently Garman broke the silence between them.

"We are drawing near town," said he. "I suppose you will no longer deny that you are the man wanted

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by the police for the murder of Mr. Tracer of Windy Oaks?"

"My story isn't a matter for their ears," answered the other. "That is what I shrink from. There is more in it than I dare tell the police. No one would understand — but a friend; and where am I to find one — now?"

His teeth chattered together, for the speed-created half-gale of wind had penetrated to his bones.

"Do you deny that you murdered Mr. Tracer?" demanded Garman.

"It is that word 'murder' that I take exception to."

"That you killed him, then?"

"Suppose I say that I did?"

"Then I should offer you a chance."

"*You?* How is that possible?"

"I cannot explain here and now. You shall know in an hour's time."

"You want me to do something?"

"Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't."

"It must be something devilish, then."

"You can refuse, if you choose. What is your name?"

"Milt."

"All right, Milt. Now you know as well as I do that if you get into the clutches of the police you are done for. And if you try to leave me again, without my permission, I will hand you over as sure as I live. I am twice as strong as you are, and twice as determined. Will you trust yourself to my hands? I repeat — I mean to offer you a chance. Now will you be placable or not?"

The other was silent. He looked at Garman in a queer and furtive manner.

"Confound you! What are you thinking about?" asked Garman.

"I was thinking that you have something ugly at the back of your head," was the slow and resentful answer.

"Very well; it's the police for you," snarled Garman, savagely.

"No! I'll chance it," replied Milt, with abrupt vehemence.

Garman nodded, muttered something unintelligible, and lengthened out the speed. In a few minutes a faint glow in the sky showed that the strange ride was coming to a finish.

Fifty-five minutes later two men turned out from Regent Street into Beak Street. The elder had tucked his arm into the other's, and they walked along in that old-fashioned way, as if they were the best of pals, though a close observer could have detected the fact that one man was in reality preventing a possible desire to bolt on the part of his companion.

As the hour was nine o'clock the big arteries of the West End had absorbed most of the life of the streets, and the narrow thoroughfares this side of Regent Street were almost deserted. A thin veil of rain had turned the dust to a clayey paste; refuse from the small, mean shops had been swept into the gutters; iron shutters were up and dingy blinds drawn.

Suddenly the older man halted. "This is our destination," he announced.

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He had stopped before a low shop with an embayed Georgian front, which bore the name, *Alexander Diarmid, Cigar Merchant.*

There was a shabby side-door, and to the lock of it he applied a key. A narrow and common little passage was disclosed, covered with a cheap linoleum. At the end of this mean hallway ascended a long flight of stairs, lighted at the foot by the naked flame of a gas-jet in a wire guard.

"This way, Milt," said the older man, and still holding the other lightly by the arm he climbed the ladder-like staircase. As they drew near to the door at the top, a voice was heard speaking in a monotonous accent, as though reading. As Garman rapped seven times on the door the voice stopped. He then knocked four times, paused, then gave two more raps.

A clear voice called, "Enter!"

As Garman opened the door he felt his companion shrink back, but he was prepared for that, and grasping him by the back of the neck, he hurled him forward with violence.

Recovering his balance, Milt looked round. In a long room about a dozen men were seated, and one standing at the head of a table, with a paper in his hand. Each man had a strip of black cloth across his eyes, which had been adjusted when Garman knocked, and each was in evening dress.

He who had been speaking, after a glance at the interrupters, continued: "I have to confirm the secession of Lord Mountcarres. In the matter of the Rochfort Cobras he thinks we stepped beyond the limits of our cult. He resigns, therefore.

"I have to report three new applications for membership. The greatest care must be exercised. One is supported by Dr. Yeatman, not present. Another by Mr. Clark Anstey, present. The third by Professor Hungars, abroad. These gentlemen know the rules of membership. As I say, great care is demanded. We all remember the affair of the Canaris Mummy, when the weak nerves of a candidate nearly burst the Club to pieces.

"With regret I have to state that the Club's address may have to be changed once more. An absolute secrecy is hard to maintain; a rumor has been spread ——"

The monotonous voice continued, but was no longer listened to by Milt. From the masked face of the speaker and his audience his eyes traveled round the room — uneasily, stealthily. Here was luxury. The Persian rugs upon the floor were worth a fortune. It was a large room of grotesque faces. They stared — a grimacing multitude from great spreads of canvas upon the walls; they grinned from the painted ceiling; they glared from the carven bodies of squat monsters of Chinese and Indian fashioning. Along the length of a table in the middle of the room stretched an immense dragon of brass covered with burnished scales. A powerful electric light glowed in the jaws of this beast, and sent two

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slanting green rays from its eyeballs.

At a touch upon his arm Milt turned and saw Garman still by his side. Both men were standing by the door, and in shadow.

"I will tell you where you are," whispered Garman. "This is one of the least known and most exclusive clubs in London, and one of the most expensive. It is called *The Sensation Club*. Are you listening?"

"What do they do here?"

"Here we worship the cult of the Sensational. Here we drink the heady wine of sheer excitement."

Milt gulped, and Garman tightened his hold upon his arm.

"Who are these men?" inquired Milt, huskily.

"Their names would astonish you; with that you must be satisfied. Most of them have run the gamut of all the thrills that life offers to the lover of them; and that is why they are here, why they are members of this association whose first duty is to provide breath-stopping, heart-stopping excitement. There is no other club in the world where such fare is to be found."

"Good Lord!" murmured Milt, rolling dilated eyes.

"You heard the President speak of three new aspirants for membership. Probably not one of them will be successful."

"Why not?"

"Because he must provide a new Sensation; or, failing that, must submit himself to one. I tell you that this is no place for weak nerves."

"What have you brought me here for?"

"That you shall know at once. Come forward!"

The President had completed his remarks, and now, for the first time since their entry, all eyes sought Garman and the stranger with him. And the sight of them, glittering behind the slits in the half-masks, boring into him, affected Milt like stabs from an electric needle.

"I have to request that someone will be so good as to keep between my charge here and the door," commenced Garman, urbanely. He spoke well; he "had the floor," and it was evident that he meant to make the most of his opportunity.

"Mr. President and gentlemen," he continued, "it is my good fortune to introduce tonight one of those adventures in pure Sensation which are the essence of this Club. I assume that we have all heard of the crime at Windy Oaks, in which a Mr. Tracer was done to death. Gentlemen, I have no doubt that the criminal is this man whom I have brought here. Of his own free will he comes; and, on his behalf, I claim for him the privileges of The Sensation Club."

The President rested his finger-ends on the table before him. "That is to be seen," said he, gravely. "Explain further."

Garman went on: "This evening I dined at the inn called *The Nine Bells*, which is two miles north of Windy Oaks. The landlord spoke of the crime, describing the dead man,

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whom he knew, and that Unknown who is wanted by the police. When I came away it was quite dark. At a lonely spot in the road my car was stopped by our friend here, who implored me, in tones of real fear and distress, to give him a lift along the London road. His manner, and his appearance — which is that of the wanted man — roused my suspicion. When I came to demand of him the truth, he jumped from the car and bolted. But he was held up in a remarkable manner. In the gloom of a sunken road he saw — or shall we say that he fancied that he saw? — the form of his victim. In his agony he described it to me — a man in a blue reefer coat, with gold spectacles; a square-built man with a brown beard changing to yellow. These were the words used by the landlord of the inn, and they were practically repeated by our terrified guest here. More, he declared that he had twice before seen that unsubstantial presence since the act — his act — of foul murder. This we may or may not believe; but in an access of mortal fear, he practically admitted the deed. My first impulse was to place him in the hands of the police; my second, to bring him here. He wishes to know what you will do with him; his plea is for the protection of the Club. That is all, gentlemen. I have played my part. I have brought you a grim guest. Mr. President, you will decide."

The moment Garman ceased talking an excited babel of voices arose. Milt turned his wild eyes upon the crowd, but he failed to catch what was being said. Twice he looked behind him to the door, but a big man was on guard there.

Suddenly the President made a sign for silence.

"Certainly Professor Hungar's queer discovery has never been put to a decisive test," said the President, calmly. "And as it seems to be the most popular suggestion, we will put it to a practical application."

While speaking he unlocked a drawer in the long table. A moment later a tiny phial of blue glass, octagonal, was in his hand.

"A wine glass," he requested, "half-filled with pure water."

He inserted the bare end of a match into the phial, and when he withdrew it there clung to it a drop of liquid. He held this over the wine glass and gently shook off the drop into the water, which slowly changed to the color of grass-green. Milt watched the proceedings with deeply uneasy intentness. The red crept from his cheeks; his eyes were haggard.

"You will drink the contents of that glass."

"What devil's game are you playing?" said Milt, huskily.

"Drink!"

"Yes — perhaps — when I know what it is."

"It is your chance of your life," said the President, with iron sternness. "It will save you — at a price. What that price is you shall know. The liquid in this phial was sent to us by a member — Professor Hungars. It con-

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tains a germ obtained by him from a West Indian swamp. He claims that the effect of this germ in the human system is to produce, with a terrible swiftness, all the signs and appearance of advanced years. The tissues waste, the arteries harden, the eyes lose their lustre, the skin yellows. So he states, and Professor Hungars is one of our foremost bacteriologists. You must now perceive the chance which we extend to you, Milt. The police are looking for a man — a young man — between thirty and forty years of age. It is highly likely that this liquid offers you the power to baffle them."

"I see," said Milt, moistening his lips. "If they find an old man — shrunken, white-haired — ah, what ghouls you are! I will not touch it!"

"You will!"

"I swear I won't!"

"You have two minutes in which to make up your mind."

"An old man of me?" muttered Milt, huskily. "How old? Fifty? Sixty? More than that?"

"Probably much more. You know as much as we do. But I am not here to answer your questions. One of your two minutes has expired. I warn you that you are in a dangerous position."

"My soul! I can believe that," groaned the fugitive, casting a dazed and cowed look at the masked faces.

No one spoke. Milt breathed heavily; slowly he reached out a hand that shook with agitation. He took up the glass. Excited whispers arose. "He'll drink!" "No! He's afraid!" "And, by Heaven, he has reason to be!"

Milt lifted the glass to his lips; but at the last moment, when he seemed about to toss the liquid down his throat, he changed his mind, and with a shout of "Blast the lot of you!" he hurled the crystal to the floor, where it shivered to pieces.

Then he leaped to the window.

"Stop him!" roared everyone.

But there was no need. Milt had become abruptly paralyzed. Clutching the dark curtains, his eyes a-glare, he was looking into the street as if he saw some unimaginable horror there.

"There he is!" he gasped. "The fourth time! He is looking up at me! He is coming over — *he!* Bolt the door! For God's sake keep him out!"

There was a rush to the window. Garman was first. In the light of a street lamp, crossing the road, his gaze lifted steadily towards the window, they all saw a square-built man with a brownish-yellow beard, and wearing a blue reefer-cut coat, and the white light flashing on the lenses of his gold spectacles. They all saw its stone-like, bloodless face.

"That's Tracer," said Garman, pitching his voice low for control.

Milt spun round as if he had been cut with a whip. "That's a lie! Tracer's dead!" he snarled.

"Perfectly true, and he is coming up here," said Garman.

That grim figure in the street was now so far below the window level as to be out of sight. A tense silence

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had gripped the occupants of the room. And then, as everyone listened in the most acute suspense, they heard the door downstairs open and close. Thirty seconds followed that ominous sound, but no other was heard.

Someone tried to scoff — "What are we getting scared about?"

No one replied. Garman stepped to the door which opened upon the long steep staircase. He opened it softly, gave one look, then recoiled as if a pistol had been thrust into his throat.

"It's coming up!" he gasped.

Milt turned round, staggered, and fell upon his knees, with one hand grasping the table's edge. At the same moment a face, ashen-livid, appeared in the doorway. Its eyes were fixed upon the crouching man.

"Keep him off! Keep him off!" screamed Milt, writhing.

But no one stirred. The bizarre figure approached the agonized Milt, slowly and stealthily. It flung out both its arms and gripped him by the throat! Milt uttered a frightful cry and closed with the terrible visitor. For a moment they rocked to and fro as if in a death clutch.

Then Milt broke loose with a shout of laughter.

"Call it off, Yeatman!" said he. "Show the cards! You've introduced me all right; and I reckon I've earned a membership to the Club!"

"I perfectly agree," said the visitor, with a chuckle. He swept off his beard, removed his spectacles, rubbed his cheeks effectively. He looked round upon the stupefied company. "A true Sensation, gentlemen! Admit it!"

"Dr. Yeatman!" gasped every voice.

"Precisely and exactly," purred that beaming individual, "and one of yourselves. This is my friend, Mr. Milt, and he is my candidate for membership. Allow that he has proved himself a most suitable applicant! We worked this little stunt together. Only he and I were in it. I knew that Garman was to dine this evening at *The Nine Bells*, Windy Oaks, for he told me so. At my suggestion my friend Milt — whose remarkable powers of acting you must concede — passed himself off as the man looked for by the police. Garman was tricked absolutely. I felt certain that he would perceive, in the encounter, an opportunity to make a big hit at the Club. To bring to it the man all the country is talking about! What a chance! And Garman snapped at it; fairly ate it up. I ask his pardon. As for me — I became a suggestion of poor Mr. Tracer, whose cruel end, still a mystery, we all hope justice will avenge.

"That is the very simple story. Allow me formally to introduce my friend and candidate for membership of The Sensation Club. May I venture to predict his enrollment?"

"I think you may," said the President.

He had to shout to make himself heard above the din of applause; and he furtively passed a handkerchief over his forehead, which was beaded with perspiration.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Here are some random quotations from the letter Sam Young wrote to your Editors, after we had bought his first story: "I sat before my Underwood, wondering how to begin to tell you about myself. Michael, my eight-year-old son, entered. 'What's the matter, daddy? Is your typewriter broken?' I answered, 'No. Would you like to break it?' He hesitated. 'No-o,' he said doubtfully. He watched me type. It fascinates him. I can't concentrate . . . Fortunately, a pal of his called him out to play. Alone, at last. My wife's out in the laundry washing clothes. She won't bother me, I hope. We've been married sixteen years and I still haven't been able to cure her of the habit of interrupting me when I'm in the throes. But she's a lovely woman, a wonderful mother to our two children. Laurel's the other one — she's thirteen . . . I mention all this to point up the delicious handicaps I've had to overcome in order to write. It's been a struggle but I can't say I've been unhappy about it . . .

"I started writing twenty-six years ago when I was seventeen. I wrote for the Paterson, New Jersey high-school monthly, 'The Spectator.' When I left high school, I went to New York City. I got a job at Macy's, did my writing nights. I managed to get in three terms with Angus Burrell's story-writing class at Columbia University. That constitutes the only 'college' education I've ever had. Mr. Burrell wasn't too pleased with my stories. I was writing 'artily' at the time. De Maupassant and Chekhov were influencing me. I was letting the dead masters dictate to me . . .

"All my life I'd been sheltered, protected. When I left New York, it was the bravest act of my life. With a shoe-shining outfit in a zippered bag, I hitch-hiked across the country, shining shoes for meals and lodgings. I became a new person. I found myself going through hardships and actually enjoying them. This was a new kind of loneliness . . .

"And I continued scribbling . . . Los Angeles . . . San Francisco . . . The town wrapped its arms around me and adopted me . . . I attended night classes. I had a job during the day, earning eighteen dollars a week. It was when I obtained this job that I sent for Ruth who was back in Passaic, New Jersey. She came to San Francisco. We were married. We lived beautifully on my eighteen dollars a week . . .

"Why do I want to be a writer? Why do I want to breathe?"

Would you bet on Sam Young? We would . . .

"Gifts for His Highness" is one of the seven "first stories" which won

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special awards in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. We think most of you will agree that the story has "something" — a quality, a sense of style and mood, a simplicity and sincerity seldom found in the work of a beginner. Yes, we would bet on Sam Young, if only he persists . . .

GIFTS FOR HIS HIGHNESS

by SAM YOUNG

EVERY DAY THE STAIRS LAUGHED at Hillman Poolk's 210 pounds. Each step was a chuckle. The entire flight a burst of insulting laughter.

What an indignity! A man of his position. He, the owner of this two-story house, must climb the stairs while his tenant and her brood resided in the flat below.

Ah, but she was of royal blood, this tenant. A Princess from his native Bulgaria whence he had emigrated many years ago. She was old, this Princess. A very old lady. Too frail to mount the stairs.

In the beginning it had been Hillman who laughed at the stairs. Snapped his fingers at them. Pouf! Pouf! A great honor had been bestowed upon him. A Princess lived in his house.

It was Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939 that drove the Princess out of Bulgaria. The Slavic nations were in danger. She fled to Paris with her treasures, her belongings. She moved into a hotel suite. But this wasn't the Paris she knew as a girl. This was a much noisier Paris, full of bustle and blare and thundering vibrations. The clamor became too much for her. She suffered an attack of the nerves.

It was through the Slavic-speaking doctor who attended her that Hillman Poolk learned of her presence in Paris. He became excited. The veins pulsed on his forehead. He asked permission to visit her. It was granted.

Never, never in his life did he dream that one day he would be in the same room with a Princess. Face to face with her. Breathing the same air with her. In the old country he had been a nobody, a peasant, as were his ancestors before him.

"You will pardon my boldness, please, Your Highness?" He spoke to her in Slavic which came more easily than French which he had never quite mastered. "I have an upstairs flat, Your Highness. At your disposal. Attractively furnished, Your Highness."

"So? An upstairs flat. An *upstairs* flat? No. You are kind, but I cannot consider your offer. I am old. I have not the strength to climb stairs."

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He could not bear that such a prize should slip away from him. Frantically he made the magnificent gesture. "Then live in our flat. Downstairs. We will move upstairs."

"We?"

"My wife, Gertle, and myself."

"So? Just you two. How sweet. You will inconvenience yourselves for an old woman?"

"You are my homeland. My body is here, but my heart is there. It would be no inconvenience, Your Highness."

"This *maison* of yours, Mr. Poolk. There is no tramway going by? Many autocars? Tracks of the *chomin de fer?*"

"No, Your Highness."

"Tootling horns! Bells! Locomotives!" She closed her eyes, leaned back wearily in her chair. "They destroy me. I have delicate nerves, Mr. Poolk. I have the migraine." A frail hand went to her head. "I must have rest and quiet."

"We are on the Rue Druout — a quiet neighborhood. Gardens. Trees. A peaceful neighborhood, Your Highness."

"Very well. You may call for me tomorrow morning at ten. I will inspect your apartment. Go now." A hand fluttered dismissingly. "Thank you for coming."

The following day, bristling with importance, Hillman brought the distinguished lady to his home. He introduced her to his wife, Gertle. He introduced her to their maid, Pilket, who was also from Bulgaria. He escorted her through rooms stuffed with furniture, laden with objects that were Gertle's conception of art. In every room there was a radio. There was even one in the bathroom.

"So many radios?" The Princess raised what little eyebrows she had left. She shuddered. "I detest the radio. Noisy, stupid boxes!"

"I own flats, tenements, Your Highness. Sometimes a tenant is unable to pay his rent. So?" He shrugged his meaty shoulders. "I accept a piece of furniture that strikes my fancy. A radio, perhaps. Such is my business. I find it convenient in this manner to collect replacements for my furnished places."

The Princess moved in. The stairs were no problem to Hillman. The prestige of having a royal personage for a tenant more than compensated for the necessity of climbing them. Hillman's round tubby body burst with pride. He basked in the envy of his neighbors, his friends, his relatives.

True, there were certain adjustments that had to be made for the sake of the Princess. They must walk quietly, speak softly. They must not slam a door. Their radios must whisper. After 9 o'clock at night — for that was when their illustrious tenant retired — their bedroom radio must remain silent. Her bedroom was below theirs. Ah, but these were only slight inconveniences for the Poolks. Hillman's bubble of ecstasy refused to be punctured.

Meanwhile, Hitler's hordes were

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advancing. The world was in turmoil. Terror prevailed. Unknown to Hillman, the Princess wrote to her niece in Sofia to escape while there was yet time, to come and live with her. The arrival of the niece and her two children caught Hillman unawares.

He had not been consulted. His permission had not been requested. Here was a slap in the face he never expected. He was, after all, the landlord. Toward a landlord a tenant was expected to display a proper respect. Besides, Hillman did not approve of tenants with children.

That was when the great honor began to lose its glow. That was when Hillman became conscious of that long flight of stairs. Resentment needled and festered. But there was nothing he could do. Greater happenings were taking place which overshadowed one's personal problems. In June 1940 a heart-breaking event took place. France, capitulating, signed an armistice with her ancient enemy. The Germans swarmed into Paris.

Time seemed to stand still then. One day was like another. An apathy settled over Paris, but underneath her inertia sparks of rebellion flickered.

Those were dark days for Hillman. He lost weight. The rich foods to which he was accustomed were no longer available. Many of his flats stood empty. The few tenants who remained were unable to pay their rent. With one exception. The Princess continued to pay hers.

The long flight of stairs sneered at him. Hillman bowed his head and endured. He had no strength, no heart for retaliation.

Then a miracle happened. The Germans were in retreat. It was incredible — but it was so. The war clouds lifted. Suddenly, as though it had never happened, the war was over.

To the Princess's ménage arrived a new addition on substitute legs. This was Gormel, husband to Namka, the niece. He had lost his legs on some battlefield.

By this time Hillman had recovered, more or less, his former self. He shook the moths out of his self-esteem. He became once more a man of importance. True, the value of the franc had depreciated. He had to spend more to buy less. Nevertheless, he was better off than most people.

Returning soldiers sought a place to live. Hillman's flats were renting again. His belly returned to its *status quo ante*. Through the black market he was able to buy the rich foods he enjoyed. But the stairs were reminding him now of his weight. They mocked his straining muscles. They laughed at his puffing breath.

He began to mutter as he climbed them. He cursed them. He cursed the day he invited the Princess to live here. Gormel he did not mind. Gormel had a good reason for not climbing stairs. But Gormel's children Hillman resented bitterly. They ran in and out of the house. What humiliation! What irony! The children, who were able to fly effortlessly up

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and down stairs, were not required to do so.

His wife Gertle was also complaining. She was putting on weight. Her legs were swollen. Pilket, their maid, came in every day to clean, to launder, but it was Gertle who had to do the shopping, the cooking.

The glamor was gone, forgotten. When they spoke of the Princess, she was no longer Her Highness. They referred to her as "the old lady."

"Only once!" Hillman raged. "Only once would I like to see that old lady climb the stairs."

"It would kill her," Gertle pointed out.

"Would we weep? Is it not time she died? She is over ninety. She has lived out her life. Must she go on living to spoil our lives?"

"If she died, that would be nice," Gertle agreed. "Then we could tell the others to go. We would move downstairs. No more steps to climb." She sighed deeply.

Finally the time came when Hillman reached the breaking-point. Coming home from rent collecting one day, he puffed his way up the stairs. He neared the top. All at once something stabbed him in the side. A most excruciating pain. It squeezed his windpipe. He could not breathe. Dizzily he clung to the bannister. Perspiration oozed from every pore. Ah, he was dying, dying.

As suddenly as it came the pain left him. He was able to breathe again. What blessed relief. Then it wasn't death, after all? Not this time. But the next time? Surely it was a warning. The stairs had spoken.

Weakly he mounted the few remaining steps. He staggered into the living-room. He collapsed on a divan.

Gertle was there, embroidering. She stared at him. "What is it?"

"An attack. Here. In my side. As I was climbing the stairs." All at once he was consumed with rage. He stood up. He clenched his fist. He waved it in the air. "No more! I should endanger my life for that old woman? No more! It is ridiculous!"

"Why don't you speak to her, Hillman? Why don't you explain to her? Tell her she must go."

"Why?" His eyes bulged at her. Flecks of red showed in them. "You ask me why? Because I too have pride. She regards us with contempt. In Bulgaria she was a Princess. We were peasants. To her we are still peasants. Has she once invited us into her home? Never! She lives in the past, that old lady. She does not realize that in France we are a republic — that here we are her equal. Ah! Such arrogance!"

Rage gave him a sense of power. The blood raced through his veins. He reached into the humidor for a cigar. He thrust the end of one between his teeth. He lifted the metal cover of the humidor and banged it shut over the opening.

"You hear that, Gertle? Listen." He slammed the lid down again, even more loudly. "You know what that is, Gertle? That is noise. That is what the Princess does not like." Abruptly

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he yelled at the top of his voice, "Gertle! The living-room door is open! I will shut it!" He reached out, banged the door shut.

Gertle was fascinated by his performance. In her lustreless eyes appeared a dull glow of appreciation. She nodded vigorously. "Good! Good!"

Hillman puffed a light on his cigar. He blew out the match. "That is only the beginning. Ha! What a fool I am. Why didn't I think of it before?"

He pointed a stubby finger at her. "From now on — I am in the living-room, you are in the kitchen — no more do we come running on tiptoe when we want to say something. We stay where we are. We call out like this." He took the cigar from his mouth and bellowed, "Ger-rtle!" He lowered his voice. "Now. Your turn."

"Hillman!" she yelled.

"Louder! Louder!"

"Hi-illman!" she screeched.

"That is better. Don't forget. No more whispering. No more closing the door softly. From now on we bang the doors. We play the radios as loud as we please. A-ah!" He paused, struck by an inspiration. "*The radio!* At 9 o'clock she goes to bed. At 9 o'clock we will turn on our bedroom radio full force." He stopped to see the effect on his wife. He puffed on his cigar.

She was impressed. "Wonderful!"

He went on excitedly, "It will shatter her nerves. Those delicate harp-strings. It will kill her, perhaps? Killed by noise." An expression of wonder came over his fleshy face. "What a weapon for a murder — noise! If she dies, it will be as though we murdered her. Do you realize it, Gertle? And we cannot be arrested for it." He chuckled.

Gertle was worried. "She may go to the Préfecture."

"What! The Princess?"

"If not her, then the others may go."

"Let them. What have we done? We made noise. In our own house. A door slammed. An iron pot dropped. Are we not entitled to our quota of noise the same as everybody else? Ah! The radio? Perhaps there we made too much noise. My wife and I — we do not hear so well. You understand. If my tenants are bothered, all they need do is to move out. Simple!" He grinned at her with the cigar clamped between his teeth. "Have no fear, Gertle. They will not go to the Préfecture. They will realize how useless it would be."

Later, in the kitchen preparing supper, Gertle banged pots, rattled dishes. They had their meal, and waited nervously for 9 o'clock to come. "She thinks we won't dare," Hillman sneered. "Wait. She will see."

The hour arrived. From the living-room Hillman scurried down the long hall to the bedroom. Before closing the windows, he swung the shutters against them. He did not want to antagonize his next-door neighbors. He turned the radio on full blast. He became deafened by a roar of

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sound. It made him dizzy. It made his heart beat faster.

There now, this was the test. Here was the weapon with which to kill. The sudden shock. That should do it.

He hurried out of the room. He closed the door behind him. The blare followed him, becoming fainter as he came to the living-room. He shut the living-room door.

They sat there for two hours. Hillman smoked and worked on his ledgers. Gertle embroidered. Diamonds gleamed on her fingers. Her swollen vein-mottled legs sought comfort on an ottoman. Eleven o'clock came. Hillman turned off the bedroom radio. They went to bed.

The next day was Wednesday. The Poolks did not leave the house. Four-thirty in the afternoon the doorbell rang. Hillman pressed the buzzer that unlocked the front door. He went to the head of the stairs. Below stood Matta, eight-year-old daughter of Namka and Gormel. Carefully she held a glass dish upon which were a small round tin and a large oval tin.

"Good evening, Mr. Poolk." She spoke in Slavic. Her voice trembled.

"Good evening, Matta."

"I have brought you something."

"You expect me to come down for it?"

"Oh, no! I can come up? I was waiting for permission."

"Come up. Come up."

Resentfully, he watched how she defeated the stairs. She came fluttering toward him as though propelled by a breeze.

"Well! What have we here?" He examined the gifts. "Caviar. Breast of pheasant. So! Noble food for the belly of a peasant." Suddenly he thrust his bloated features in front of hers. "The old lady. Is she — is she well?"

Matta shrank from his breath, from the frightening glitter in his eyes. "You mean . . . ?"

"Is she — is she perhaps — dead?"

Matta was bewildered, frightened. She blushed. She shook her head. "Oh, no! She is in pain. In bed all day. Her head. We called the doctor. He gave her medicine. But she lives."

A fear smote Hillman. "He gave her sleeping pills?"

"She asked for them. I heard her. He refused. He said they would be bad for her heart. He gave her a liquid medicine. He said that would make her sleep. Please? May I go now?"

Hillman straightened. He shouted toward the kitchen where his wife was getting supper ready. "Gertle! Did you hear? The old lady, she still lives!" He turned to the girl. Imperiously he waved her away. "You may go."

So? A liquid medicine to make her sleep? Well, they would see which was stronger, the radio or the medicine. At 9 o'clock Hillman repeated the business with the bedroom radio. At 11 o'clock, when they went to bed, he turned the radio off.

Thursday afternoon the doorbell rang. This time it was Tomasso,

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twelve-year-old brother to Matta — a slim, dignified young man.

"More peace offerings," Hillman muttered to his wife. She sniffed. Together they leaned over the railing at the top of the stairs.

"Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Poolk."

"Good evening, Tomasso."

"It is a pleasant evening out, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Please, may I come up? I have something for each of you, something I am sure you will both like."

"Come up, Tomasso. Come up."

He came bringing a box of cigars for Hillman and a bottle of expensive perfume for Gertle.

Hillman examined the box of cigars. "I see somebody knows the brand I like."

"You told us. Last Noel. So we bought you a box."

"Yes, I remember. Tell me, Tomasso, how is the old lady? The medicine — is it helping her?"

A sullen expression came over the boy's face. "She is not 'old lady.' She is 'Her Highness'."

"No more!" Hillman bellowed. "We are in France. In France she is 'old lady.' In France the landlord is Your Highness." Unexpectedly he burst into laughter. He laughed so hard he was seized with a fit of coughing — spluttering, spraying, tears streaming down his face. Gertle grinned appreciatively, showing her gold teeth.

Different tears were streaming down Tomasso's face, tears of humiliation. He raced down the stairs and out of the house.

Later, Gertle finished the supper dishes and came out of the kitchen to behold a strange sight. Hillman was stretched out in the hallway, his ear pressed to the open heat-register. Curious, Gertle came closer and listened.

"They're moving her bed into the living-room!" he stage-whispered. With a struggle and his wife's assistance, he came to his feet. He chuckled. "So! The medicine was not so strong, after all."

That night it was the living-room radio that brayed loudly. The Poolks were in their bedroom, each sitting on top of one of the twin beds. Hillman read the newspapers and smoked. Gertle embroidered. The bedroom radio was playing softly. At 11 o'clock he ambled leisurely into the living-room and shut off the radio.

On Friday, Hillman spent most of the morning on a chair by the open register, listening. Gertle would come for a report.

"Anything?"

"Nothing."

During lunch, he said between mouthfuls, "They are plotting something. I know. I feel it. Remember in the old country when a guest had to sleep overnight and every bed was full — remember what we did?"

"We made a bed in the kitchen out of chairs. You think . . . ?"

He nodded.

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"Don't they know we also have a radio in the kitchen?"

"They know, but they think we do not know where she will be sleeping."

Later they waited at the railing for the bell to ring. At a quarter to five, it rang.

"This time it is Gormel, the legless one," Hillman chuckled to his wife.

Gormel, father of Tomasso and Matta, smiled up at the two pumpkin heads peering down at him. "Good evening!" he sang out in a lyric tenor.

"Good evening," they responded solemnly.

"I have something for you." He had a hand hidden behind his back. "A surprise, a wonderful surprise. May I come up?"

"Please do."

They watched, their eyes glittering with interest, how cleverly he manipulated his artificial legs. With one hand he clung to the banister, the other hand behind his back holding the surprise. When he arrived at the top, there were beads of perspiration over his upper lip, but he was still smiling.

"How did you enjoy the caviar? The breast of pheasant?"

"We haven't opened the tins yet."

"We are saving them for a special occasion," Gertle volunteered.

Hillman stared at her sternly. Be still! his eyes told her. *I* will do the talking.

"Look!" Gormel flourished the gift before them. "Something to go with the caviar. Champagne from the old country. One hundred years old!"

Hillman tried not to show how impressed he was. He cleared his throat. "Thank you. Tell me," he croaked. "How is she . . . the old one?" With a shattering sound he cleared his throat again.

Gormel shook his blond head. He smiled sadly. "Her nerves are in a bad way. The doctor says she must have rest and quiet. During the day she dozes. Fitfully. She cannot sleep. Street noises bother her. The children. She has had no sleep these past few nights. You understand." Gormel gazed at them hopefully.

"I am sorry to hear it," Hillman said stiffly. "Good night."

"Good night, Mr. and Mrs. Poolk." Holding onto both banisters, Gormel swung himself down the stairs.

When the front door closed, Gertle demanded indignantly, "Why don't they take her to a hospital? Why don't they move out?"

Hillman nibbled one of her chins with his fingers. "Patience. There is something else I want to see happen."

In appreciation of the champagne Hillman turned on the kitchen radio, not loudly, not softly, just medium. The same with the bedroom radio. The same with the living-room radio. Then they put on their coats and went to a neighborhood movie. They came home at midnight. They looked at the stairs. They looked at each other. Hillman chuckled. Gertle grinned. When they arrived in their apartment, they turned off the radios and went to bed.

The next day Gertle inquired,

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"Tonight Namka will bring something, you think?"

"Yes. Then only the Princess remains." Hillman rubbed his hands. His eyes glittered.

Gertle's eyes popped open. "You think she will come? The Princess? She is ill. Dying, maybe."

"She will come. Ah! That is what I've been waiting for. To see her climb those stairs."

That evening they waited by the railing. Gertle passed a remark. "I hope no more perfume. Don't they know I never use perfume?"

At six o'clock the bell rang, the door opened. There stood Namka, wife of Gormel, mother of Tomasso and Matta, niece of Her Highness, the Princess. A beautiful figure of a woman was Namka. Tall. Regal. With black hair and flashing eyes.

Hillman gazed at her greedily. He felt his wife brushing against him. He frowned. He moved away and came to the head of the stairs. He beamed at the visitor. "Good evening, Namka. How goes it with you?"

"With me all is well. I wish I were able to say the same for Her Highness, my aunt." She looked at him coldly. Her lips curled. "I have something for you, Mr. Poolk, and something for Mrs. Poolk. Stay where you are. I will bring them up to you."

She bounded lightly up the stairs. From a pocket of the coat she was wearing she brought out a brooch and a watch. The brooch she gave to Gertle, the watch to Hillman.

Her voice was flat, lifeless. "Those are heirlooms. They are priceless. That is a chime watch, Mr. Poolk. It was made in the old country. In good condition still. It will strike the hours." She hesitated. When she spoke again, her voice trembled. "That brooch, Mrs. Poolk, was worn by Queen Zora, grandmother of my aunt, the Princess."

Suddenly she burst into tears, clapped her hands to her face. "Excuse me," she mumbled, and ran blindly down the stairs. The door slammed behind her.

From pink, Hillman's face changed to red; from red, to purple. He was finding it difficult to breathe. Furiously he flung the watch away from him. He snatched the brooch from Gertle and flung that away.

"Bribes! Insults!" He paced the floor gesticulating. "Do they ask us once to shut off the radios? To please, I beg of you, not to play the radio so loud? Not to slam the door? No! They will not condescend to beg a favor of us. We are peasants. We are common. And they? Nobility. Pah! They bring me gifts. Cigars. Champagne. A silly watch. Not enough! Not enough, I tell you!"

"Hillman! Hillman! Do not excite yourself!"

With an effort he calmed down. "All right. Tomorrow night it is her turn. Then we shall see. The radios cannot kill her. Perhaps the stairs will do us that favor. We shall see."

Sunday evening she came. The Princess. A very old woman. Very old. But holding her head high, carrying

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herself with dignity. On her head was a tower of yellow-tinted white hair. Jeweled combs glittered. Her face was like a death's-head, so little flesh was left to cover the bone structure. So sunken were her eyes, it was as though she had no eyes at all. Now and then a highlight flashed from their hollows. Blue veins stood out on her forehead; blue veins also on the backs of her hands that were like the long bony claws of a scavenger bird. She wore a yellow lace evening dress with a high collar, and around her shoulders, a silken shawl. High-button shoes peeked out from the rim of her dress.

With one hand she clutched an elaborately carved ivory jewel-chest. The other hand clung to the balustrade. Slowly she mounted the stairs, one at a time. At every second or third step she would pause to rest.

She was muttering, shaking her head, unaware of Hillman and Gertle watching breathlessly from above. The voice, speaking their native tongue, floated up to them.

"I am old. Yes. Of course, I am old. Who says I am not? I am an old woman but I am also the Princess. Stop! Stop!" She paused on a step, closed her eyes. "My head! My blood pressure! Ah! Better now." She resumed her climb, resumed her muttering. "Do not forget who you are, I beg of you. Do not forget why you have come. That is important. You should have come in the very beginning."

She looked up and for the first time observed the two faces staring at her. She gave a start. "Oh! There you are!" She smiled, displaying dental plates that were yellowed like old piano keys. "My friends!" she croaked. "You see? I come at last. Wait. A little patience. I will soon be with you."

Watching her tortuous journey became too much for Hillman. He rushed to the head of the stairs, Gertle also. "Shall I help you, Princess?" he stammered. "It is an honor . . ."

"No! Stay where you are. I am almost there. A few more steps. I will rest just once more, if you don't mind."

They stood there helplessly. Slowly she came . . . closer, closer. Only two more steps. One step. At last! What a relief. She was on the landing. She leaned against the railing, closed her eyes, clutched the ivory box.

Finally she opened her eyes. She smiled at them. "Look what I have brought you." She drew herself erect. She opened the box. With one quick movement she brought out a jewelled pistol and shot them both dead.

Watch EQ on TV

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THE QUICK BROWN FOX

by EDMUND CRISPIN

THE PORT HAD BEEN ROUND SEVeral times, and Wakefield's temperamental dogmatism was by now somewhat inflamed by it.

"Just the same," he said, irrupting upon a discussion whose origin and purpose no one could clearly remember, "detective stories *are* anti-social, and no amount of sophistries can disguise the fact. It's quite impossible to suppose that criminals don't collect useful information from them, fantastic and far-fetched though they usually are. No one, I think" — here he glared belligerently at his fellow-guests — "will contest *that.*"

"*I* contest it," said Gervase Fen; and Wakefield groaned dismally. "For all the use criminals make of them, the members of the Detection Club might as well be a chorus of voices crying in the wilderness. Look at the papers and observe what, in spite of detective fiction, criminals actually do. They buy arsenic at the chemist's, signing their own names in the Poisons Book, and then put stupendous quantities of it in their victims' tea. They leave their fingerprints on every possible object in the corpse's vicinity. They invariably forget that burnt paper, if it isn't reduced to dust, can be reconstituted and read. They spend, with reckless abandon, stolen banknotes whose serial numbers they must know are in the possession of the local police. . . .

"No, on the whole I don't think criminals get much help from detective stories. And if by any chance they *are* addicts, that fact by itself is almost certain to scupper them, since their training in imaginary crime — which is almost always extremely complicated — tends to make them overelaborate in the contriving of their own actual misdeeds; and that, of course, means that they're easy game. . . . For instance, there was the Munsey case."

"It has always been my opinion," said Wakefield to the ceiling, "that after-dinner conversation should be general rather than anecdotal. Moreover —"

"I'd known the family slightly," said Fen, unperturbed, "over quite a long period of years. There were five of them, you remember: George Munsey, a little, round, chuckling man who'd made money on the Stock Exchange; his wife Dorothy, vague and stately and benign, who acquired something of a reputation as a poetess in the earlier twenties and lost it again, conclusively, in the later; Judith and Eleanor, the two daughters, aged twenty-two and twenty-five respectively, and both uncommonly pretty; and George Munsey's sister Ellen, a dour, disapproving woman who battened on them, being herself genuinely penniless. With the exception of Judith, they all endured

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Aunt Ellen very patiently; and Judith's dislike of her hadn't, I think, any rational basis, but was more in the nature of a violent temperamental aversion such as sometimes crops up between dissimilar personalities. Aunt Ellen didn't reciprocate it, by the way: if anything, she was rather fonder of Judith than of the others.

"Aunt Ellen apart, they were a well-to-do family, since Mrs. Munsey and Judith and Eleanor had all inherited substantially from Mrs. Munsey's father. However, they kept no servants, preferring, on the whole, to lead a mildly Bohemian existence, looking after themselves. Their house was — is, I suppose I should say — in St. John's Wood; and I was staying there on the night of the murder.

"I'd traveled up from Oxford to deal with some odd scraps of business and to get myself a new portable typewriter (eventually it was a second-hand one I bought, in Holborn). On the following morning I had to attend a Ministry of Education conference, and I was proposing to stay overnight at the Athenæum. At lunch-time, however, I chanced on George Munsey in the Authors' Club bar, and when he heard how I was placed he suggested I should stay with him instead. I warned him I'd have to work — there was a long memorandum to be typed out for presentation at the M. of E. conference — but he was quite agreeable to that; and so at about half-past two in the afternoon I duly appeared on his doorstep, typewriter and all.

"I wasn't the only guest, it turned out. The second spare bedroom was occupied by Eleanor's current fiancé, an over-handsome but tolerably pleasant young man called Tony Odell, the owner (I was told) of a chain of milk bars in the West End. In addition to being Eleanor's fiancé, he was Judith's ex-fiancé; and I gathered, indirectly, that it was he rather than Judith who had been primarily responsible for the breaking-off of their engagement. However, none of the three seemed much discomfited by the exchange, and until the next day I wasn't in the least aware of anything's being amiss in the house.

"On arrival, I found that Judith was in the kitchen, concocting something or other; that Aunt Ellen was upstairs refreshing herself with an afternoon nap; and that the other four — Mr. and Mrs. Munsey, Eleanor and Odell — were playing Racing Demon in the drawing-room. Now, I have a fondness for Racing Demon, so having dumped my bag and typewriter in my room, I joined in; and the five of us played uninterruptedly for the next two hours. At half-past four, on the Munseys' departing in a body to make tea, I retrieved my typewriter and settled down in the library to work. There I stayed — recruited by food and drink which the family brought in to me at irregular intervals — until nearly midnight. I hadn't any occasion to leave the library, so I've no idea what the others did with themselves; and I don't remember that anything more

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eventful happened to me, during the remainder of the day, than having to put a new ribbon into my machine. By the time I'd finished my job they'd all gone to bed, and I wasn't at all sorry to follow them.

"But next morning, Odell being not yet up and the others unitedly engaged in cooking breakfast, Judith took me aside, in a state of considerable agitation, and confided to me certain matters which I must confess disturbed me a good deal. Summarized — for conciseness' and Wakefield's sake — what she told me was as follows:

"She'd heard me come up to bed at midnight, and having finished her book, and being still sleepless, had set off, as soon as the closing of my bedroom door signaled me out of the way (she was a modest child, and apparently had very little on), to fetch a magazine from the hall. Arriving at the head of the stairs, however, she had looked down and seen Odell slip quietly out of the drawing-room and into the library, whence shortly afterwards she heard the rattle of my typewriter, which I'd left down there. In the normal way she wouldn't have thought much about this, but Odell's manner had struck her as distinctly furtive, and she was curious to know what he was up to. She hid in the hall closet, and after about ten minutes Odell emerged and crept upstairs to his room. Then she went into the library to see if she could find any indication of what he'd been doing there. Well, she did find something, and in due course showed it to me . . ."

Fen broke off rather abruptly; and when he resumed, it was to say: "You know that when you're using thin typing-paper you usually put a second-sheet behind the sheet you're actually typing on?"

Haldane nodded. "Yes, I know."

"That's what he'd done. And he'd left the second-sheet in the waste-paper basket. And you could read what he'd typed by the indentations on it. And what he'd typed was not in the least pleasant."

Fen paused to refill his glass. "As I recall it," he went on after a moment, "the message ran like this: *You remember what happened at Manchester on December 4th, 1945? So do I. But a thousand pounds might persuade me, I think, to forget about it. I'll write again and tell you where to leave the money. It will be the worse for you if you try to find out who I am.*"

Haldane nodded again. "Blackmail," he murmured thoughtfully.

"Quite so. But there was just one odd thing about the message on that revealing second-sheet, and that was its heading. It consisted of four words: 'The quick brown fox.'"

There was an instant's bemused silence. Someone said: "What on earth . . . ?"

"Yes. A little mystifying, I agree. But anyway, there it was — and there too, more importantly, was the impression of the blackmail note. And if Odell was blackmailing someone in the house, then the situation

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required very delicate handling indeed. Judith wanted my advice, naturally enough," ("Tcha," said Wakefield) "as to what she ought to do. But I never had a chance to give it to her, because it was at that point in our conversation that we heard Eleanor's scream. Eleanor had gone to call her fiancé down to breakfast, and had found him dead in his bed.

"Well, the police came, and the Ministry awaited me vainly, and as soon as the routine of the investigation was over, Superintendent Yolland took me into consultation. The facts he had to offer were singularly unenlightening. Odell had been killed by a single blow on the forehead. The weapon was a heavy brass poker from the drawing-room, and no great strength would have been needed to wield it effectively. Death had occurred between five and six A.M. and had been instantaneous. There were no fingerprints and no helpful traces of any kind.

"Naturally, I felt bound to tell the Superintendent what Judith had told me; and by way of response, he produced for my inspection two sheets of typing-paper which he'd found hidden away in one of Odell's drawers. The first one I looked at bore, in a faint and spidery typescript, the blackmail message I've already quoted — but *not* the odd superscription. The other was identical with the first in every possible respect, *except* that it was addressed, like the second-sheet, to 'The quick brown fox.' And that being so —"

"That being so," Wakefield interrupted, "you didn't, I trust, have to do any very strenuous thinking in order to solve your mystery."

"You think the solution obvious?" said Fen mildly.

"I think it child's play," said Wakefield with much complacency. "With what, after all, does one associate the words 'the quick brown fox'? One associates them, of course, with the sentence 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog,' which has the peculiarity of containing all the letters of the alphabet. To cut a long story short, Odell wasn't *writing* a blackmail note: he was *copying* one, *in order to find out if it had been typed on that particular typewriter.* In other words, he was not the blackmailer, but the blackmailer's victim.

"He started to type out 'the quick brown fox' sentence, as a means of comparison, and then decided it would be simpler just to copy the complete message. And the original, together with his copy, was naturally enough found in his drawer. I take it that he wasn't the man to accede meekly to blackmail, and that he'd made up his mind to find out who was threatening him; at which the blackmailer took fright and brained him while he slept.

"As to who the blackmailer was, that's easy, too. As I understand it, both messages *were* in fact typed on Professor Fen's machine." Fen assented. "Just so. Well, then, between the time Professor Fen entered the house and the time Odell made his

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copy, what opportunity was there for anyone to use the typewriter? One, and one only — the period during the afternoon when Professor Fen was playing Racing Demon in the drawing-room. And — well, we know there were only two people who weren't uninterruptedly engaged in that game: to wit, Judith and Aunt Ellen. Judith you can eliminate on the simple grounds that if she'd been the blackmailer she'd scarcely have told Professor Fen what she did tell him. And that leaves Aunt Ellen. . . . Did you ever find out anything about Odell and Manchester and that date?"

"Yes," said Fen. "Odell (and that wasn't his real name) had deserted from the army on that date and in that place. And Aunt Ellen, who'd been in the ATS, had access, at one time, to the dossiers relating to deserters. In one of those dossiers she'd seen a photograph of Odell, and consequently she recognized him the first time he entered the house."

"She didn't attempt to deny having recognized him?"

"Oh, no. She couldn't very well deny it, because — having discreetly checked back to make sure she hadn't made a mistake — she'd confided the facts to Judith after Odell became engaged to Eleanor; and Judith had advised her to do and say nothing, on the grounds that Odell had a first-rate fighting record, and that his desertion, at the end of the war, was therefore a technical rather than a moral offense."

"Well," said Wakefield smugly, "I'm not asserting that on the case I've outlined you could convict Aunt Ellen of the *murder* — even though it's pretty certain she did it. But she was arrested, I take it, for the blackmail?"

"Oh, dear, no. You see, Wakefield," said Fen with aggravating kindness, "your answer to the problem, though immensely cogent and logical, has one grave defect: it doesn't happen to be the right answer."

Wakefield was much offended. "If it *isn't* the right answer," he returned sourly, "that's only because you've not given us all the relevant facts."

"Oh, but I have. You remember my telling you about changing the ribbon in my typewriter?"

"Yes."

"And you remember my saying that one of the blackmail messages was in 'a faint and spidery typescript'?"

"So it would be, if it was typed in the afternoon, before you changed the ribbon."

"But you remember also, no doubt, my saying that apart from 'The quick brown fox', the second sheet of typing-paper was identical with the first *in every possible respect?*"

For once Wakefield was bereft of speech; he subsided, breathing heavily through his nose.

"Therefore," said Fen, "*both* messages were in faint, spidery typescript. *Therefore they were both typed in the afternoon while I was playing Racing Demon!* And therefore Judith's

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story about Odell using the typewriter after midnight was a deliberate pack of lies from beginning to end.

"Under police examination she broke down and confessed to the murder; and in due course she was tried and convicted, though the death sentence was eventually commuted to life imprisonment. She hated Odell for jilting her in favor of her sister; and if she hadn't planted the messages in Odell's room, and spun me her fairy tale about blackmail in a sophisticated, double-bluff attempt to incriminate Aunt Ellen, she might have got away with the killing. But the trouble was, she read detective stories; and what she dreamed up — in the hope that everyone would make the very deductions Wakefield has just been making, and probe no further — was a typical detective-story device. . . . I hope no one will imagine I'm mocking at detective-story devices. In point of fact, I dote on them. But so long as criminals take them for a model, the police are going to have a very easy time; because, like the wretched Judith, your genuinely murderous addict will dig his cunning and complicated pits for the investigators — only, in the upshot, to fall head-first into one of his own very extravagant traps."

NEXT MONTH . . .

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You have probably read a Laurence Kirk short story before — his tales have appeared in most of the leading magazines in America — Harper's, Collier's, Harper's Bazaar, Redbook, Ladies' Home Journal, to list only a few. Laurence Kirk's real name is Eric Andrew Simson, and he is a brother-in-law of one of our favorite authors, F. Tennyson Jesse. Mr. Kirk's pseudonym has an interesting origin: he was born in Edinburgh, and spent most of his early life in Scotland, on the borders of Angus and Kincardine; his postal address at that time was Laurencekirk.

How broad is the meaning of the word "mystery"? In the publishing business it has come to be pretty much a generic term: pure detective stories, thrillers, tales of suspense, psychological case histories — all these and many others, including even the spy story, are now indiscriminately catalogued as "mysteries." And surely it is true that EQMM has always interpreted "mystery" in the larger rather than in the narrower sense — indeed, each month we try to give you as diversified and varied a selection of stories as possible. Yet, in the past ten years, we have not strayed over the borderline into the supernatural more than a few times — so infrequently that perhaps we do not have an accurate gauge of our readers' feelings.

Now, the Laurence Kirk story to which we gave a special award in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest is frankly a ghost story. True, there are ghost stories and there are ghost stories, and we think Mr. Kirk's is an unusually fine one. But perhaps you don't want ghost stories in EQMM, no matter how good they may be. If so — if you want EQMM to restrict its contents exclusively to tales of detection and crime, in a basically realistic vein — please let us know. But we can't help thinking that every once in a while — every once in a long while — a ghost story just hits the spot . . .

ONLY GHOSTS STAY YOUNG

by LAURENCE KIRK

IT IS AN ERROR TO SUPPOSE THAT ghosts are transparent creatures who only show themselves by moonlight. It is equally an error to think that they drape themselves in white, drag chains behind them, or carry their heads beneath their arms. In reality they are very ordinary folk, like us. The only difference is that you will hardly ever hear them speak.

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The ghost I am thinking of lived in a small Kentish country town. She went by the name of Miss Raynor and could be seen in broad daylight in the streets, generally walking in front of you. Far from being transparent, she was rather a stout old lady. But sometimes, even when she was quite close in front and turned a corner, there would be no sign of her at all when you turned the corner after her. That, of course, might be explained by the fact that she had gone into a shop. Or again it might not.

She lived in what was known as The Walled House. It was Queen Anne or very early Georgian and had a very beautiful fanlight above the door. It was quite a small house for the country — five or six bedrooms probably — but I have never met anyone who had been inside it. It was called The Walled House because the garden had a solid twelve-foot wall all around it. The only break in this wall was in Fisher Street, where there was a doorway with an exquisitely-worked iron gate which was always locked. Through this gate you could see over a bit of lawn into the garden behind, and people often paused there in the hopes of seeing Miss Raynor inside. But they never did. The lawn was always mown, however, and the garden well kept. The delphiniums in particular were a perfect joy in their season, against the gray wall. But whatever season it was, when you had finished eavesdropping at the iron gate, you probably came away wondering how one single old lady could keep the garden in such good order and yet never be seen at work in it. It was a little uncanny, and might mean that some of the strange things that were said about Miss Raynor were true. On the other hand, although it was known that she hired no gardener, it was certain that the milkman left milk at the door and that the coal merchant dropped sacks of coal through the manhole beside it; and that both of them had their bills paid regularly. So perhaps there was nothing in the strange things that were said, after all.

This was the situation one warm still sunny afternoon in September 1940, and had been the situation so far as I knew for sixty or seventy years. But that afternoon a frightened German pilot in a medium bomber thought he had a Spitfire on his tail. He therefore dived and unloaded his stick of bombs on the first target he could see, and that happened to be the little Kentish town. The first bomb fell in a pond on the outskirts; the second took a corner off a bakery; the third went bouncing down a street and lay unexploded on the steps of the police station; and the fourth landed slap-bang on The Walled House and blew it to smithereens.

They began to search for Miss Raynor almost before the dust had settled on the remains of the garden. But though they worked for days they never found anything that offered any explanation. There was the wreckage of some furniture, a

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few silver spoons, broken china and broken glass. But of Miss Raynor there was nothing. Not a finger. Not a drop of blood. No clothes. Not a brooch or a ring; nor the cameo she always wore when she went out. On the other hand they did come across a portion of a silken ladder made out of old bell-ropes; and the air-raid wardens who knew the stories about Miss Raynor began to scratch their heads. . . .

Bombs can do the oddest things both in hitting people and in missing them. In another air raid near Selfridge's, a taxi with four men in it completely disappeared, and as far as I know no one ever suggested that there was anything supernatural about it. The case of Miss Raynor was a little different, however, because of the stories that had been told about her, and a good many people in the town watched carefully to see what happened next. For instance, if Miss Raynor had really died in 1871, as was supposed by some, there was no reason why a mere bomb should interfere with her appearing in the streets. And again what about her money? If a ghost could sign checks, then a ghost could presumably leave a will. The Walled House had been a valuable property, and even though it was rubble now, it must have been left to somebody.

Most of these questions were answered in time. First, no one ever again saw Miss Raynor walking in the street in her blue cloak and cameo. That seemed to indicate that Miss Raynor had been as real as The Walled House and had departed with it. The question of the money did not quite prove anything either way. There were five hundred and twenty-two pounds three shillings in her bank account, but no trace of any will could be found. None of the local solicitors had ever acted for her, and the bank manager had to confess that he had never set eyes on her. The money was paid into her account direct from government securities, and the milkman and the coal merchant were always paid by check. Neither the bank manager nor his two predecessors had ever seen Miss Raynor in person. So there was a good deal of speculation concerning the nature of her existence.

The talk no doubt would have died down very quickly if it hadn't been for the vicar. He had always been very scathing about any form of superstition and had refused to believe that there was anything odd about Miss Raynor except that she did not go to church. He was very distressed that there was neither an arm nor a leg left for him to bury in public. He felt that that would have put the whole matter in its proper perspective for good and all. As this was denied him he proposed to hold a special memorial service for her. But here again he was frustrated. The air-raid wardens pointed out that with another raid possible at any moment it was undesirable to gather people unnecessarily in one place. So, finally, he decided to have her name

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engraved — at his own expense — on her father's tombstone. . . .

AND OF HIS DAUGHTER ALICE
on the 13th September 1940
AGED 90 YEARS

Considering what Miss Raynor's relations with her father were supposed to have been, it was perhaps a rash thing to suggest. In any case, the stone mason who was entrusted with the work was taken ill and nearly died the night before he was due to cut the first letter. After that no one else would take on the job, and tongues started wagging again.

It was soon after the sudden illness of the stone mason that I went in to see Mrs. Reason. I would have gone sooner but Mrs. Reason had been in bed with her arthritis ever since the bomb fell. Arthritis permitting, there was never any difficulty about seeing Mrs. Reason in spite of her ninety-one years; for she kept a curiosity shop and sold anything from antimacassars to old golf balls. She never remembered who you were nor what she had told you the last time you were there. This last peculiarity gave me an opportunity to check up and see if her stories about Miss Raynor had now altered in any way. For Mrs. Reason was the source of nearly all the stories about Miss Raynor. She was the only living person who had known Miss Raynor when she was a young girl and unquestionably alive.

Mrs. Reason was sitting shelling peas in her usual chair by the fireplace, with all her junk around her. I begged her not to get up and then continued.

"Nice to see you about again, Mrs. Reason. How are you?"

"Poorly," she replied. "Poorly. But I mustn't complain at my age. . . . Anything special that you want today, Mr. Spenlove?"

Spenlove is not my name, but I passed that over.

"No," I said. "I'd just like to have a look round."

"Go ahead," she answered. "But you won't find much. Can't get the stuff nowadays. Can't get about as I did. But there's a nice pair of rummers over there."

I wriggled my way round to look at the rummers while Mrs. Reason went on shelling peas. One had to wriggle in Mrs. Reason's shop, for if your front wasn't in danger of knocking something over your back was sure to be.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Reason shelled another pod and went on acidly.

"So the poor old vicar couldn't bury her after all!"

I examined the rummers, saying nothing.

"Couldn't even put her name on the tombstone!" Mrs. Reason continued scathingly. "Well, some people just won't take a telling, Mr. Spenlove."

I put the rummers down.

"What did you tell the vicar, Mrs. Reason?"

"Why, the truth! The same as I told everyone else. That Alice Raynor died in 1871. Suicide it may have

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been — and then again it may not."

"But, Mrs. Reason, the milk bottles! The bank account! How do you explain those?"

"I don't explain it, Mr. Spenlove. And I don't explain either how people saw her in the street. *I* never saw her — but then I knew she wasn't there."

I sat down in the high-backed chair opposite Mrs. Reason.

"What was Alice Raynor like in those days?" I asked.

"Pretty," she answered. "Very pretty. And gay. And naughty, too. She had dark hair which was parted in the middle and sleeked down the sides of her head. I wore it that way myself then. It was the fashion, you know."

"She was an only child?"

"Yes, her mother died in childbirth. That was when Mr. Raynor put the wall all round the house."

"To shut himself in?"

"To shut people out, I should say. To keep Alice for himself."

"And what was Mr. Raynor like?"

"Hard. Self-righteous. With a spade-shaped beard. You don't know what fathers were like in those days. Thought the Almighty of themselves."

"Was there any truth in this elopement story?"

"Of course there was!"

"But if she was kept shut up like that, how could she meet anyone?"

"She went out with her father; they were important gentry, you know. It was at Canterbury it happened. There was some to-do at the cathedral, and this young rip was down from London staying with friends. He sat next to her in the pew."

"That was the beginning of it?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"There were notes. Billets-doux, they called them then."

"But how did you know?"

"I was the go-between."

"I see! And the elopement?"

"I was to keep a lighted candle in my window so long as the way was clear. The candle was there all the night, but he never came. He had been killed in Hyde Park in a duel that very morning."

"But, Mrs. Reason, surely dueling was finished in England by 1871!"

The old lady gave me a scalding look.

"Dueling is just a form of fighting, Mr. Spenlove. To the best of my knowledge men haven't finished fighting yet."

I went on more humbly. "Anyway he was killed?"

"Yes. But of course no one knew then what had happened. I don't think Alice ever knew why he didn't come."

"And if he had come, she was going to let herself down with the silken ladder?"

"That's right. The pony-carriage was to have been round the corner in Nightrider Street."

"Were you watching by the window with the candle?"

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"Of course!"

"What happened?"

"It was July and her window was open. Ready. Then at three o'clock in the morning — that was two hours after Harry ought to have come — I saw a hand shut the window. A big hand — not like hers at all."

"And you never saw Alice again?"

"Never. A few days later Mr. Raynor gave out that she had gone to finish her education in Brussels."

"And after that?"

"Mr. Raynor was found the next morning at the foot of the stairs with his neck broken, and the silken ladder was all entangled about his feet."

"Was there an inquest?"

"Yes, of a kind. Accidental causes, they said."

"But you didn't believe them?"

"Oh, yes, I did. At the time. It wasn't till two years later that I began to wonder about it, and then it was too late to do anything. Not that I ever could have, they being gentry and me not."

"Did Alice stay in Brussels all that time?"

"So they said."

"Well, they must have written to her to tell her of her father's death!"

"That's what they said."

"And she answered the letters?"

"So they said."

"Then she must have been in Brussels?"

"Not necessarily. If a dead woman could sign checks for over sixty years, she could answer letters for two."

"You never saw her when she came back?"

"No, that's what made me begin to think. If she'd been alive she would have come to me. She'd have wanted to talk about Harry."

"Was she very much in love with him?"

"Desperately. She'd have done anything for him."

"What do you think really happened, Mrs. Reason?"

"Mr. Raynor knew. He paid the other man to pick a quarrel with Harry and kill him. Of course, he didn't tell her that. But he saw that she didn't trust him and he strangled her that very night."

"And the body?"

"He buried it in the garden."

"Weren't there any servants in the house?"

"Yes, two poor scared creatures. They lived in the cottage at the back."

"Did you ever ask them any questions?"

"No, they left when Mr. Raynor died. Before I'd begun to be suspicious."

"And was Mr. Raynor's death accidental?"

"Of course it wasn't! She was there, haunting him. She tripped him up with the silken ladder."

I got up slowly and looked at the glasses again.

"How much are these rummers, Mrs. Reason?" I asked.

"Thirty shillings the pair. They're good ones. You couldn't do better."

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"Then I'll take them. . . . Do you think we've heard the last of Alice Raynor, Mrs. Reason?"

"I don't see why, Mr. Spenlove. If she stayed on all this time it must have been for some purpose. Alice won't go until she gets what she wants."

I paid the thirty shillings, hoped that her arthritis would improve, and walked home with the rummers in my hand. There hadn't been many discrepancies in the story since the last time. But the hand shutting the window was new, and before it was to Paris not Brussels that Alice had been sent. These seemed to be signs that I had just been listening to the maunderings of an old woman's mind. It certainly was odd that Mrs. Reason was the one person who had never seen Alice Raynor in the streets. Odd, too, that the stone mason had been taken ill so suddenly. But how could one get over the milk bottles and the bank account? Surely the simple, obvious explanation was the true one. It was not that Alice Raynor's body had died and her spirit remained alive; but rather, as is much more common, that her spirit had died while her body remained alive. That happens to many people. And in spite of all the stories, the only reasonable thing to think was that Alice Raynor had really gone to Brussels and really come back, that she had really grown old and really been killed by a German bomb.

Thus I argued all the way home and for several days afterwards; but I cannot say that I ever entirely convinced myself that Alice Raynor had died in 1940, and not in 1871.

There were no more bombs on the little Kentish town during the war; even the doodlebugs flew harmlessly over it, and the rockets never strayed as far as that. After the first cleaning-up nothing more was done to The Walled House: it remained a scar and became a playground for the noisier children. This was partly for lack of labor and building materials and partly because nobody yet knew to whom the wreckage belonged. So the willow-herb planted itself there, as it did in London, and made quite a show where the delphiniums used to be. Nothing more was seen or heard of Alice Raynor, and with the death of Mrs. Reason in 1942 even the stories about the lady of the Cameo seemed unreal and legendary.

Then one day, when the war had been over for eighteen months, they began to pull up the street that led to The Walled House. No one knew what it was all about at first, but then at the same time timber and bricks began to be unloaded where the house used to be, and finally it became known what was going to happen there. We were going to have a brand-new, automatic telephone exchange.

I don't think anyone was very pleased when they heard about this. For one thing, when the building began to take shape, it was new and low and long and failed to tone in with

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the old surroundings. And for another, we resisted change in any form. We were quite satisfied with the old system; and though the operators were slow at times, we should miss the cheerful girl who would inform us when we rang a certain number that it was no good because the owner of that number was in Canterbury having a hair-do.

However, when progress is being wished on you there is not much good resisting. The low oblong building grew brick by brick, and soon it was having a roof put on it. We were relieved when we saw that it was a tiled roof and not slate or corrugated iron. At the same time mysterious complicated machinery was being installed inside, and the day came when they took away our old receiver and gave us a dialed one instead. It was another three months before we were permitted to use the dial; but when we did, we were surprised to get our number rather more quickly than we had in the old days. And finally, the first monthly bill came in.

I frowned when I looked at it, and frowned again when I studied the details. I then looked across at my wife Marjorie who was sitting opposite me at breakfast.

"Darling."

She looked up from the births, deaths, and marriages, which she always studied before she let me have the paper.

"Yes, darling."

"You're not having an affair with someone in London, are you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Or going to an expensive dressmaker?"

"No."

"Then why are you always ringing up Mayfair?"

"But I'm not always ringing up Mayfair, darling."

"Well, I'm certainly not. And there it is!"

Marjorie studied the list of calls which I had handed her.

"What fun!" she said at last. "I must be having four affairs, not just one. They're all different numbers!"

It was time for me to go to work and nothing more was said on the matter for the moment. When I came home in the evening Marjorie was in a state of great excitement. I should explain perhaps that Marjorie is a very credulous woman. That is, except when I am trying to pull a fast one on her myself. Then she is quite different.

"Darling!" she began. "I think I know what's been happening."

"About what?" I asked vaguely. I had forgotten about the telephone bill.

"The calls to Mayfair. We're not the only ones."

"Of course we're not. Everyone gets telephone bills if they have a telephone."

"Don't be silly, darling. The Adamsons and the Greggs have both been charged with calls to Mayfair that they never made. They've written in, complaining."

"Oh, well, I suppose they're bound

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to have teething troubles with a new exchange."

"But it isn't a question of teething troubles at all. Have you noticed that they are all night calls."

"Well, no, I haven't."

"They're all one and sixpenny calls. They'd have been two and three if they had been day calls."

"All right. So what?"

Marjorie looked more mysterious than ever and sat down beside me. Then she went on breathlessly.

"It was in Hyde Park that Harry fought his duel, wasn't it?"

"According to Mrs. Reason, yes."

"And where did he live?"

"According to the same rather doubtful source, he lived in Hertford Street at the corner of Shepherd's Market."

"That's quite near Hyde Park?"

"Very near."

"And it's in Mayfair?"

At last I saw in what direction Marjorie was heading.

"Darling!" I said. "I am quite prepared to believe in ghosts, but I am not yet ready to believe that they mess about with dial telephones."

Marjorie now thrust the bill at me.

"But look at the numbers!" she cried. "Here's the first. 0497. And then a week later it's 0622, and then 0713, and 0944. The numbers are going up all the time."

"Does that lead us anywhere?"

"Yes, it does. Because the Adamsons and the Greggs have got some of the missing numbers. And the three thousand other subscribers no doubt have got the rest. She's going through them from the beginning until she gets the right one!"

"Who's she?"

"Don't be silly, darling. Alice Raynor, of course."

"You think she's trying to get Harry on the phone after all this time?"

"Not necessarily. She may be trying to get the man who killed him. Or his son. Or his grandson. If I were a ghost and someone presented me with an automatic telephone exchange, I could think of quite a lot of things to do."

I thought I was going to have a bad night after this. When Marjorie dreams, she has a habit of flinging out her left arm suddenly and it falls almost invariably in my right eye. However, this time Marjorie slept quite peacefully. But that did not prevent me having a bad night. First, I was in the new telephone exchange. I knew the engineer in charge slightly and had been over it when it was first opened. It was an eerie experience even in daylight when I saw it. There are dynamos and dials, and batteries and cables; but the main feature of it is half a dozen tiers of shelves with narrow alleyways between them. The interior part of the shelves is a crazy criss-cross of wires: black wires and blue wires and red wires and white wires. But the outside facing you appears to be a collection of metal canisters. These look as though they might contain tea or rice or something innocent like that, but in reality

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their contents were quite beyond my comprehension. And as you stand there you may suddenly hear a click-click-click in the canister by your right knee: then a click-click-click behind your right shoulder: and finally a click-click-click-click at the far end of the room.

That was how it appeared in the daytime. Now at night it was much more uncanny. I was the engineer standing alone distractedly in one of the alleyways and the click-click-clicks danced around me in the silence like will-o'-the-wisps. My job was to stop poor Alice Raynor from troubling Mayfair; but they all seemed ghosts to me: the mother dialing for the doctor; the householder for the police; the lover to make up a quarrel; the lonely to hear the sound of a human voice. But no sound of any human voice came to my ears. It was click-click-click here and click-click-click over there, click-click-click beside me and click-click-click far away. Ghosts! All ghosts! Will-o'-the-wisps! Finally, I could stand it no longer and ran madly from the building. . . .

I must have slept for a time after that, for next I was walking up Fisher Street before the bombs fell and while The Walled House was still standing. Alice Raynor was in front of me in her blue cloak and cameo, and this time I followed her right into the house, stepping through the heavy oak door in the same way she did. And the moment she was through the oak door the cameo and blue cloak vanished, and she was dressed as Mrs. Reason had described her with her pretty dark hair sleeked down the sides of her head — a girl of twenty-one wearing a simple yellow dress.

I had then one of those moments of extreme clarity which occur in dreams and only in dreams. Outside the house she had appeared as we would have seen her: aging, tiring, thickening; inside, she appeared as she saw herself: a girl of twenty-one. After all, she never would be more than twenty-one. She was right to see herself like that. And for her there was a timelessness as well as an agelessness. She no longer had to worry because Harry didn't come for her. He would come, and time didn't exist. That was why the garden had bloomed so lavishly for nearly seventy years. Harry was coming for her. No doubt it was because the Germans had deprived her of her garden that she was now taking more active measures and making use of the thing that had taken its place. . . .

I had rather a bad headache the next morning. All the crystal clearness of my dreams had vanished and I realized among other things that a call to Mayfair was not just a matter of click-click-clicks at our local exchange. It was a Toll call — Toll B to be exact — and one had to dial O on one's instrument. A ghost might be able to dial O, and might not; but there were other complications. The call would go direct through our exchange to an operator at Canter-

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bury. She — or rather he at night — would see the light on the panel, plug in, say "Toll B" — and then ask what number was wanted. Having plugged in to the outgoing line he would ask for the caller's number. Finally, when the receiver was lifted at the Mayfair end, two lights would indicate that the call had been completed and the timing apparatus would begin to work. The operator had no need to listen in to tell when the call was finished: the lights did that, and the timing apparatus showed every tenth of a minute as it passed. Each call of this sort was recorded by the operator on a separate little slip of paper, which found its way finally to the billing department.

All this seemed to me to make it extremely unlikely that even the most practical of ghosts could have anything to do with it. But Marjorie did not share my doubts. She said that neither we nor the Greggs nor the Adamsons had made the calls — therefore Alice Raynor must have made them. And besides, she added, the calls were always made between twelve and one, and that was the hour during which Alice Raynor was going to elope with Harry.

I had a very prompt reply from the telephone manager, regretting that they were having some trouble at the new exchange (this seemed to indicate that the calls to Mayfair from other exchanges were genuine enough) and saying that another bill would be submitted omitting the disputed calls. Nothing more happened for two days; then on the third morning a supervisor called up from Canterbury and asked if we had rung up Mayfair 1321 at 12:29 during the night. I said no, we certainly hadn't, and the supervisor thanked me and rang off. Marjorie was furious with me over this. She said that if it had been she who had answered the telephone she would have got the whole story out of the supervisor.

Marjorie went off a day or two later to stay with her sister, and I walked round in the evening to *The King's Arms* which is one of our forty-four pubs. There in a corner, by himself, looking very disconsolate, was the engineer who had shown me round the exchange.

I sat down beside him.

"Well, how's everything?" I began cheerfully.

He drained off the remains of a pint.

"Awful!" he said feelingly. "Absolutely terrible!"

I immediately ordered two more pints.

"Is it the Mayfair calls?" I asked.

"Of course it's the Mayfair calls!"

"Is that the only exchange concerned?"

"So far, yes."

"Well, you're bound to have teething troubles, aren't you?"

"Teething troubles! This is a ruddy tusk coming in! A mammoth's tusk!"

"But I'm sure all the people here understand that it isn't your fault."

"I'm not worrying about the people here. That's nothing to the trou-

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ble at the other end. People don't like being hauled out of their beds at one o'clock in the morning to answer the phone, and then hearing a voice say, 'Hurry, hurry, hurry!' It's uncanny. They don't like it. And I don't blame them."

"Is that what the voice always says?"

"That's what it says when it says anything. Sometimes it just hangs up when Mayfair answers. It's always this end that hangs up first."

I sipped my beer in silence for a moment. I was wondering what the voice really did say. Was it "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" Or was it perhaps "Harry, Harry, Harry!" Or even "Hurry, Harry, hurry!"

"What kind of a voice is it?" I asked.

"A woman's voice apparently."

"Quite a young voice?"

"So they seem to think. . . . Of course, we're only just beginning to check up seriously. There wasn't any reason to suppose that there was anything wrong with those Mayfair calls until they were all disputed. But now we do check up every single time. Callers sometimes give their own number wrong as well as the other, you know. So we ring the caller's number back each time — while we're trying to get the Mayfair number — and we always get a busy signal. It's very odd."

"Very odd," I agreed.

"Of course it's faulty wiring somewhere. We'll fix it in time. But you see what we're up against."

I thought I knew what he was up against a good deal better than he did. But I saw no point in talking about ghosts to a man with all those technical letters after his name. Instead, I offered him another pint.

He shook his head and rose wearily to his feet.

"It's enough to make any man take to drink," he said. "But I'm not going to. I daren't. I've got to get this thing fixed."

It was then that I had my brainwave.

"Will you do me a favor?" I asked. "I mean, later on when you have got it all put right."

"Why, certainly. . . . You want to know how we fixed it?"

"No, no. I wouldn't understand a word of that if you told me."

"Then what?"

"When it's all over I just want to know what the last Mayfair number was that was called."

The engineer looked puzzled, but agreed to do as I wished.

About ten days later the engineer rang me up. His voice was quite different, just as though he had newly fallen in love, and I realized at once that something good had happened to him.

"We've got it!" he announced.

"You mean, the trouble at the exchange?"

"That's it. Stumbled on it quite accidentally. Very interesting technically. I'd like to tell you."

"I'd like to hear. But as I've al-

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ready said, these things are quite beyond me. I can replace a fuse, and that's all."

"It was a fuse that put me onto it, as a matter of fact."

"Then the fault was here at your exchange?"

"Oh, yes, it was here all right. Look, it's quite simple really. I'll tell you."

"No, no," I said firmly. "Just the number, please. The last Mayfair number that was called."

He sounded disappointed, but he gave me the number which for security reasons I shall call Mayfair XXXX.

When I told this to Marjorie she thought deeply for a moment, and then said that it was quite time that I took a little holiday. I knew that a holiday to Marjorie meant a visit to London; and while I like going to London with Marjorie, I also knew that when she takes a husband there a lot of unbudgeted expenses fall upon him.

Nevertheless, we went up to London and stayed in a hotel. Marjorie was in command and immediately after lunch she went and had a long session with Telephone Enquiries. When she came back she was looking very pink in the face and I thought for a moment that she must have had a rebuff and discovered that Mayfair XXXX was the number of a dentist in Shaftesbury Avenue, or something of the sort. But not a bit of it. Mayfair XXXX was the number of a pub called *The Crown and Anchor*, and it was in Hertford Street at the corner of Shepherd's Market.

I pointed out to Marjorie that the pubs had just closed and wouldn't be opening again for four hours; but in spite of that she immediately dragged me off to Hertford Street. There we examined *The Crown and Anchor* from the outside, noted that the position tallied with what we had heard, and saw that the doors and windows were painted a pleasant shade of green. We then walked along Hertford Street towards Hyde Park. On the way we passed a house agent's — Dean & Daintree, Established 1851 — and Marjorie said we might as well go in and ask about flats.

I followed her in some trepidation and the trepidation continued when a senior well-dressed member of the firm offered us several flats and houses, all at enormous rents. Marjorie managed to find some objection to all of them and finally said that she hadn't realized that the district had become so commercialized. The house agent, with a pained expression, asked what she meant, and Marjorie explained that she was referring to the shops opposite and the pub at the corner. She supposed, she added, that it was all the result of the war. Still dignified and still pained, the house agent replied that it was not the result of the second war, nor even of the first. *The Crown and Anchor*, for instance, had been a pub since 1881. And what had it been before, Marjorie asked, rather too eagerly? It had been a private house, the agent informed

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her, and it had become a pub because it had been empty for ten years. Why had it been empty for ten years, Marjorie demanded? Because, the agent answered coldly, it had acquired a bad reputation for some reason and nobody would live in it. The pub on the other hand, he added, had a very good reputation and caused no inconvenience of any kind to the residents in the neighborhood.

At this point we withdrew in fairly good order and went and sat in Hyde Park. It was delphinium time and both of us were thinking, not only of the garden at The Walled House, but also of a scene which had taken place somewhere around us, when a young man lay dead on the grass soon after dawn.

Finally, a few minutes after six, we stepped into *The Crown and Anchor*. There were a few people there already, but they paid no attention to us, and we sat down at the bar and ordered pink gins. Presently the landlord came wiping along the counter towards us and I think he was just going to say something when the telephone rang at the other end.

He looked up, a little anxiously, we thought, and then went on wiping, as a barmaid took up the receiver.

"Have you been having any trouble with the telephone?" Marjorie asked the question in her most innocent manner.

"No, not really," the landlord answered.

"Some people have, haven't they?"

"So I believe. . . . And it did ring here three nights running."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. The wife was asleep and I was too lazy to get up."

"Was that all?"

"It rang again the fourth night."

"And you still didn't get up?"

"No. But the receiver was off when I came down in the morning."

"Was there any explanation?"

"No, we didn't bother. When anything like that happens we just say it's our little poltergeist."

"Poltergeist!"

"Yes. When glasses get broken in the night or someone takes a nip at the port, we just say it's the poltergeist. Saves a lot of trouble."

Marjorie and I looked at each other. We both knew that secret drinkers weren't necessarily ghosts. We knew, too, that the telephone troubles could be fully explained by electronics or something of the sort. But to us at any rate electronics are far more supernatural than ghosts, and we preferred to think that the long period of waiting was over and that Alice Raynor had got to her Harry at last.

So we ordered two more pink gins and drank a toast to their health — to the Lady of the Cameo and her Harry. . . .

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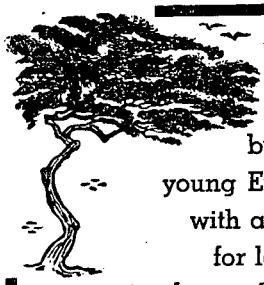

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